DUST IN THE BALANCE

BY

GEORGE KNIGHT

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GEORGE KNIGHT, of London

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A MIA CÁRA

"Io non posso fuggir, ch'ella non vegna
Nell' immagine mia,
Se non come il pensier che la vi mena."

'Life,' said the Poet wearily—
'A dust that dances elfishly
In the rusty balance of Destiny,
Stirred by the breath of Eternity?'

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AN AMATEUR PROVIDENCE

"He taketh the wise in their own craftiness."

Eliphaz the Temanite.

AN AMATEUR PROVIDENCE.

THE white fingers poised the test-tube cautiously, while the unfaltering right hand dropped a single minim of acid into its contents. No change, no sign. The colourless fluid in the narrow glass vessel remained placid and clear. In a moment it was set down in the frail wooden stand, and the experimenter sprang to his feet.

"Absolutely perfect!" he exclaimed. "I may only have re-discovered the *aqua tofana* of the seventeenth century, or one of the subtle weapons of Cesare Borgia, but, at all events, there it is—an absolutely perfect poison. So to treat"—he dropped his voice to a whisper, with a glance round the big, silent laboratory—"so to treat arsenic with chloroform and my new metal that it becomes ten times more deadly, yields to no known

antidote, and reveals its presence to no known re-agent—*bah!* it is a very elixir of death."

He emptied the test-tube into the earthenware sink, and began to put away his apparatus.

"Old fool that I am," he said grimly to himself, putting the glass shade over a pair of infinitely susceptible balances, "to spend so much time and trouble in making poisons when I have neither desire nor reason to harm a single hair of any creature's head! *Chut!* I must give less attention to my hobby, that is all. If one could only reconcile one's conscience to putting a few of this world's tyrants out of the way! But I suppose we mustn't meddle with what is the business of Providence—though, really one might be pardoned for thinking that even a mortal could improve somewhat upon the cosmic scheme as it evolves itself in Battersea."

He put away the balances in the safe, and swung the door to.

"Now, if only," he went on, with his hands under the tap, "one could be quite sure that the powers above would look leniently on an amateur, one might be tempted to poison a few rickety babies occasionally."

He splashed the water upon his face and neck.

It was a shrewd countenance that looked back at him out of the spattered mirror. Deep-set greenish-grey eyes flashed under the thick brows, and the closely-cropped beard of a reddish-white revealed a powerful jaw and mobile, humorous mouth. He caught up a soiled towel and used it vigorously. Then he slipped on his collar and tie, turned down his cuffs, brushed his hair, threw on a loose frock coat, and became a respectable-looking medico in the prime of his forties.

"Business now, David, my lad," he said briskly, polishing the damp from his hands by rubbing them together; "business *and* pleasure. First, to old Mother Robins of Portland Place, and a five-guinea fee; second, to little Mattie and half-an-hour's chat."

He closed the laboratory door behind him, locked it with a slender key, and swung off on his round.

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when he walked unceremoniously into the tiny room where Mattie Fearnought sat at her lace-cushion. He stood watching her a moment, for though he had marched abruptly into her presence he was so light of foot that she had not heard him. A small woman, a trifle ungraceful, but of an elf-like interest. Sallow skin, brilliantly black eyes, high cheek bones, and a thin-lipped mouth; these were Mattie, and Mattie was them.

"Back's better a bit, Mattie?" he observed at last.

She looked up and smiled, unsurprised by his presence. When Mattie smiled she was irresistible. It was like a burst of sunshine out of the heart of some grave October day.

"Much, Doctor," she said. She had a firm though childish voice.

"Ah," he returned, watching the nimble

fingers as they thrust the bobbins in and out among the flowers and leaves of the gossamer fabric.

The Doctor perched himself on the edge of the table and swung his legs.

"You've done a lot," he commented after a pause.

"I'm mending," explained Mattie. "Duchess of Norwich. Family heirloom. Wanted to send a maid to watch me at it."

She laughed—the cynical laughter of contempt.

"These nobilities always suspect one. Take your pattern off my cloth, say I. 'Your Grace,' I told her, 'I've more already than I can do. If I am to mend this, say so, and if not, let me get back to my work.' She gave in, not because she trusts me, but because there isn't another pair of hands in all London, ay, or in all England, that could 'restore'—that's what it's called, isn't it?—these flowers. At least, if there is, they can't find her—or him, as the case may be," she added.

"Good for you, Mattie," agreed the Doctor. "Nothing like knowing your worth, and standing up for it. Why, Mattie," he lifted a corner of the lace, "it's a dream of delicacy. This is the work of some Grinling Gibbons of the bobbin."

"Who was Grinling Gibbons?" inquired Mattie, stopping with a jerk.

"The greatest of all carvers in wood," said the Doctor. "A man who could write his name on a pine block with a chisel as you can scribble yours with a pen on paper, and who could fashion a flower so fragile that it shook with the passing of a cart in the street. He was an artist in wood, and this has been done by an artist in lace."

"*Pfui!*" scoffed Mattie, "I can do as good. It's the age and the washing, and the thread they made then, that gives it that look and feel. See here——"

She reached to a drawer, took out a packet wrapped in tissue paper, and opened it. The contents looked like a miniature handkerchief of the finest lace, folded into four.

"Feel it," said Mattie.

The Doctor took it. It was strangely heavy for so small a thing.

Mattie caught it by a corner and flung out her arm. The lace unfolded, a wide square of silky mesh, like the skeleton of a cloud.

The Doctor touched it admiringly.

"You did it?" he asked.

Mattie nodded.

"It must be worth a lot," he said.

"Money wouldn't buy it," replied Mattie firmly.

"Why?" pursued the Doctor. "I think I should like to have it."

Mattie's face clouded.

"I'm sorry," she said, "but I've vowed I never would part with it."

"Then I won't ask for it, Mattie," he promised, "even at your own price. But why do you want to keep it?"

Mattie looked at him sideways.

"It's to be my bridal veil," she answered.

The Doctor sighed.

"About your back, Mattie?" he said.

* * * * * *

Some days after this the Doctor sat drinking tea at Mattie's fireside. It was not his customary hour. He had been detained, and had telegraphed to say that he would call at six. He was tired, and enjoying the hot, sweet fluid. Mattie was very silent and preoccupied. The Doctor understood her moods, and did not cross them. Besides, he was watching the sallow little fingers that so exactly matched the tint of the old lace among which they flickered to and fro.

"Mattie," said the Doctor abruptly, "about that bridal veil——".

"*S-s-sh!*" interrupted Mattie, lifting her fingers, with the bobbin, anchored by a long thread, between them.

There was a footstep on the stairs—a sharp, though, to the Doctor's ear, curiously irregular footstep.

"Who is this, Mattie?" he asked, and then stopped.

Mattie's eyes were ablaze with joy.

She rose with her usual difficulty, and crossed to the door. It opened before she reached it. A young and well-dressed man stepped into the room, and Mattie flung herself into his arms.

"Are you *very* glad to see me, pet?" he rallied her jestingly.

The Doctor did not like his voice. It came from the back of the mouth and upper part of the throat. It was superficial, lacking chest-chords.

Attracted by an emphatic tap of the Doctor's heel, the new-comer turned, and regarded his *vis-à-vis* with unmistakable disfavour.

Mattie comprehended the situation.

"This is the Doctor," she said coolly, returning to her chair, "you've heard me speak of him. Doctor, this is a friend of mine, Mr. Cyril Owen."

"Pleased to know you, sir," added the person indicated, with sufficient cordiality. "You've been very good to Mattie."

The Doctor motioned to his teacup.

"Miss Fearnought has been very good to me," he corrected, setting it down with a rattle. "And I must say 'thank you' to her, and 'good-bye' in the same breath, for I have stopped too long already."

The Doctor shook hands with the two, and departed clumsily.

At the room door he paused and looked back. Mattie's eyes were on fire with pleasure, her face glowed with the eerie, intense sunshine of her smile. But she was looking away from the Doctor.

The Doctor sighed.

* * * * * *

"He is very fond of me," said Mattie, "and would marry me to-morrow if he could. Only he is poor, and his father wants him to marry somebody better than poor little me, so he won't give him any money. But Cyril is going to get some position."

"What kind of a position?" broke in the Doctor, swinging his legs.

"I don't know; something where he can earn enough to keep me. He says I shall only make lace for my own amusement then, and not for money."

Mattie was looking into vacancy with dreamy, girlish eyes. The Doctor could tell what golden visions of the future floated before them.

"Mattie," he began seriously, "I have looked after you now for some time, years I think."

"Yes," she said gaily, "and my back is nearly cured; enough, at least, to get married."

The Doctor winced.

"Well," he went on, "I want to be sure that you will be safe in your lover's hands. I would have the world very gentle to you."

She looked annoyed. Mattie's eyes could look annoyed.

"Don't be angry, Mattie," the Doctor said tenderly, "but tell me; do you trust him?"

Mattie looked up amazed.

"Do you trust him?—nay, I don't mean that. Do you know him enough to trust

him—have you known him long enough to be quite sure that you will always be happy with him?"

The Doctor's voice was almost caressing.

"I don't know what you mean," retorted Mattie, with the vexed look in her eyes. "I love him. What more do you want me to do?"

The Doctor bit his lip.

"Nothing, Mattie," he said, a trifle huskily; "nothing."

* * * * * *

The Doctor went home one afternoon and took out of the safe that stood in an obscure corner of his den a large, stiff, legal-looking document. He studied it carefully, weighing its involved sentences with deliberate precision. It was a life-insurance policy for two thousand pounds. On his desk lay an intimation that the quarterly premium was due.

He got his cheque-book, wrote a cheque for the amount, and took it to the post.

Coming back, he locked himself into the

laboratory, and flinging open his safe and desk, rapidly reduced a terrifying chaos of manuscript to the ordered symmetry of tape and dockets.

Then he sat down, drew up a sheet of foolscap, and made out a will—a short one, couched in curt, characteristic phraseology. By way of preamble, it bequeathed to various professional friends and distant relatives a long list of scientific and personal effects; but its chief clause was one devising to "Miss Martha Fearnought, of 5, Quintin Street, in the parish of Saint Anthony-the-Martyr, in the City of London," the interest on a certain sum of two thousand pounds, payable upon a policy of the United Kingdom and General Economic Assurance Syndicate—the said sum to be duly invested for her sole benefit during her lifetime.

"Harrison will get her a safe three per cent. for me," meditated the Doctor, swinging his legs. "That will be a pound a week. And if need be she can make a little with her lace work."

He scrawled a letter to "Frederick Harrison, Banker, Lombard Street," had it posted and sent for his housekeeper.

"I am going to Norway for a month's holiday," he said. "I shall be back the fourth Saturday from now. Just pack my bag. I'll be ready in an hour."

He got into a hansom, and had himself driven to Quintin Street.

Mattie was working busily. Her "bridal veil" was thrown over her brown hair, and she was singing to herself:—

"Gin a body meet a body,
Comin' thro' the rye;
Gin a body kiss a body,
Need a body cry?"

"There are some kisses that bring tears, Mattie," observed the Doctor's grave voice, as he took his inevitable seat upon the table-edge.

She looked up, smiled at him from under her veil, and went on with the familiar ballad:—

"Ilka lassie has her laddie,
Nane, they say, hae I."

"That is not true, Mattie, for you," the Doctor demurred laughingly.

"No," she said, "I have my laddie," and she kissed a corner of the lace that hung by her cheek.

The Doctor sighed.

"Isn't there," he said, "a song which goes:—

"Ilka laddie has his lassie,
Nane, they say, hae I?"

"And haven't you?" asked Mattie.

"Yes," conceded the Doctor, wrinkling his thick brows, "yes, I have my lassie."

"I'm glad," commented Mattie cordially. "You are very good to her, aren't you?"

"I hope so," said the Doctor, and sat silently swinging his legs. He roused himself with an effort, said "Good-bye," and drove off for his bag and train.

* * * * * *

The Doctor walked into his laboratory. His holiday was over: he had enjoyed it immensely—and the laboratory was thick with dust. He threw off his coat and started to clean up. Having completed this preliminary, he got out a set of delicate apparatus from the safe, and began upon an intricate process. When it was finished he held a small test-tube, half full of a colourless, tasteless, odourless liquid. The Doctor decanted it carefully into a wine glass, and washed out all his paraphernalia. Then he burned a dingy scrap of paper, which he took from the safe, in the flame of his spirit-lamp, and tossed the ashes out of the window. Finally he picked up the glass and swallowed its contents.

He looked at his watch.

"No effects for ten minutes," he reminded himself casually, and rinsed the thin crystal.

He began upon a series of experiments in re-agents, and worked on calmly. At length he started, and passed his hand across his eyes. A glance at his watch showed that the stipulated interval had flitted by.

"Beautiful," he said. "To the second. I had better sit down, I suppose, and do something trivial for the last five minutes. It's a blessing there are no squirmings in the business; I'm no beauty to begin with. Oh, here's an evening paper!"

He settled down to scan its columns. Struck by a sudden sardonic thought, he turned to the record of births, marriages, and deaths.

"Mine will be in here to-morrow," he remarked. "Mrs. Fletcher is sure to patronise a Tory organ—Good God!—what was that!—I thought I saw something—my sight is going—last few seconds blind—let me see—let me see!"

He strained his failing vision over the print.

"OWEN—WARDLAW. On Thursday, at the Church of St. James-the-Less, Kennington, Cyril Owen, youngest son of John Owen, The Elms, Kennington, to Maud Alice, daughter of——"

The Doctor's head dropped on his breast.

"My God," he cried, "I've lost her, I've lost her. I am a fool in the eyes of Heaven —an accursed fool. I—I—God! I could laugh! I—it's too funny—I—I—*Ha, ha, ha!* Air, air, *air*—for pity's sake! Mattie! Mattie! you are suffocating me with your bridal veil. I cannot breathe, I—I—*A-h-h-h.*"

* * * * *

In her room in Battersea little Mattie, the lace-hand, sat white and silent, with a newspaper at her feet, and a shredded bridal veil upon her lap. Her sallow fingers tossed the tattered gossamer to and fro, as her childish voice rippled in a pathetically distorted minor, with a break on the high note :—

"Ilka lassie has her laddie,
Nane, they say, hae I."

SIR FOLLY

"AND THEY SAID: 'WOULD HE DEAL WITH OUR SISTER AS WITH AN HARLOT?'"

The Story of Dinah & Shechem.

SIR FOLLY.

THE Jester walked in the King's Pleasaunce to take the air. Deep drinking overnight leaves even a professional wit but dull brains in the morning, unless he arise betimes and cudgel the drowsiness out of them. And kings are not always satisfied with a leer and a platitude, else the life of a court fool were too like Elysium. Wherefore, Sir Folly walked in the sun, and thought busily. Occasionally one of the silver bells on cap or doublet-seam tinkled musically, and an impertinent bird in the copse hard by chirped defiantly.

"*Pah!*" said Sir Folly at last, and sat down on a low-growing bough. "I would forswear the wine-cup for evermore, were it not that by drinking His Majesty half-witted, I save my brains and economise me my good jests,

which are none too plentiful. Yet a plague on the liquor! It leaves one as heavy as a country bumpkin with a bellyful of ale inside and a soft haystack beneath him. Smile upon me, ye Muses of Jocosity, the while I essay once more. I say to the King, 'Majesty, why is thy fair son, the Prince, like his godship, Olympian Jove?' 'Marry, perpend,' says Majesty, 'and see that thou transgress not the bounds of reasonable flattery, Sirrah Folly.' 'Sire,' I reply, 'he appeareth amorously to maidens, even as Jove to Danae, accompanied by a shower of gold.' Then do all the ladies giggle, the Prince fretteth, and the King roars most royally. Then say I, 'Majesty, why is thy fair son, the Prince, *un*like his godship, Olympian Jove?' 'Say on thyself,' says Majesty. ''Tis very simple,' say I. 'Danae died and gained reputation; these maidens, whom the Prince favoureth, live and lose it.' Upon which the ladies whisper and handle their daggers, the Prince laughs, and the King, looking away from his royal consort, grinneth most unctuously. 'Yet one

other riddle, sire,' I proceed, 'why is your Majesty like, and the Prince unlike, his godship on another occasion?' 'Perpend,' says Majesty, 'but see that thou transgress not the bounds of courtesy.' 'Your Majesty,' I answer shrewdly, 'hath been smiled upon by fair dames, even as Jupiter was smiled upon by Leda when he came in the likeness of a swan; the Prince hath been—and is—smiled at by fair dames, for that he cometh, unlike Jupiter, in the guise of a goose.' Whereat I am put into the bilboes with a mightily increased reputation for satire and epigram."

The Jester got up from his swaying, rustling seat, and sauntered forth into the sunshine. Presently he began to hum a quaint melody, and at last broke out into singing:—

"Moths, silly moths,
About him there,
Black, chestnut, brown,
And golden hair;
Black eyes and grey,
Hazel and blue,
Noble and rich,
And peasant too."

"Heigho!" sighed the Jester.

"Hearts false and fine,
Thrive, nor see blame;
Hearts pure and true
Perish of shame.
Beneath soft silk
And flashing star,
Princes' dark breasts
All heartless are."

"Soft!" muttered the Jester, as he stepped down from one grassy terrace to another; "petticoats—and in tears!"

Prone on the short velvety turf lay a little country girl, shaken with a passion of grief. Her trim grey kirtle was all crumpled and creased, and as the Jester laid his hand on her shoulder he felt that her white bodice was limp with the dew. Her face was buried in her hands, and her long brown hair hung down to shut out the sunlight.

The Jester's face wrinkled for a moment with some inexplicable emotion. At last he spoke, but in a voice that was not his own—a voice tender, lingering, persuasive, the very intonation of love.

"Softly, softly, sweeting," he said.

The little maid sprang suddenly into life. She rose upon her knees, shaking back the brown locks out of her eyes, and looked up at him.

Her tear-stained face clouded, and the wet lids overflowed.

"Who spoke?" she asked.

"Marry! that did I, little maid," replied the Jester; "was't not like the Prince's voice?"

His answer was a paroxysm of grief.

"By'r Lady," remarked Sir Folly, "this will not do," and he sat himself down beside her on the yielding sward.

The little maid cried on, and the Jester watched her moodily. Then, bending close to her ear, he sang gently—

"Beneath soft silk
And flashing star,
Princes' dark breasts
All heartless are."

"For the love of the Virgin, fair sir," said

the peasant, rising upon her knees again in girlish distress, "make not a mock of me! Who may you be, sir?"

"'Tis a pretty face," mused the Jester, regarding her, "and it seemeth familiar. Soft oval, plump cheeks, red lips, white teeth, and the peach-bloom of Madam Summer on a tender skin. When didst thou come, sweet one?"

She covered her face with her hands, pressing her hair against her eyelids, as though to create a deeper darkness about her.

"Yester-even," she sobbed. "I was to have a place in His Majesty's kitchen, and as I came through the hall——"

She stopped—thrust back into silence by the shame of the unspoken words.

The Jester's mouth set gravely. He put a vague conclusion to her broken sentence.

"The Prince saw thee."

"Ay," she wept, "and bade me bring him wine."

"And gave thee of it to drink?" supplemented Sir Folly, with a wise sadness.

A shuddering inspiration trembled to his ear.

"And bade thee dance a country dance to please him?"

Once more the quivering sigh broke through her interlaced fingers.

"And then thy head spun, and——" the Jester paused.

The little maid sank down in the grass and moaned despairingly.

"Hast any mother?"

"No."

"Nor father nor brothers?"

"None."

"Art in sad case, wench," Sir Folly said slowly.

"Oh, sir, are you not some great lord who can tell the King?"

The peasant looked up at him through the tangle of her brown hair.

Sir Folly shook all his bells and laughed.

"I, maiden? I am the King's fool. But why should the King be told?"

He looked at her pityingly—guessing her thoughts.

"Foolish little maid," he finished sadly. "The Prince is to marry a great lady; you are——"

He flipped a feathery dandelion-head with his finger and thumb. It vanished in tiny arrow-points.

"Just that," he said.

She fell upon her face again in the grass.

The Jester stroked her hair gently. "*Sh-s-sh*," he whispered warningly, "here is the Prince." He felt her shiver beneath his hand.

The Prince strolled down the upper terrace by the same path that the Jester had come. In a few moments he stood above them.

"So-ho, Sir Fool," he observed, "art drying thy sister's tears?"

Sir Folly gazed at the little maid's face. Its lines seemed strangely familiar. A lurid fear grew upon him. He thrust his hand into his bosom and strode up to the speaker.

"What means this banter, thou silken puppet?" he hissed between his teeth.

"Are not all women thy sisters, good Sir

Piety?" sneered the Prince. "Hast forgotten the sermon thou readest me?"

"If all women be my sisters, I have a heavy debt to pay thee, Sir Prince," said the Jester loweringly.

The shaft went home. "Still pert, Father Folly," retorted the Prince, stung; "however, so be it; that maiden was enough thy sister to serve my taste for revenge," and he looked into the Jester's eyes.

Sir Folly turned.

"What is thy name, maiden?" he demanded, between his teeth.

"Cicely Nickell," she said, gazing affrightedly at the two men.

A slender blade flashed out of the Jester's bosom, and buried itself haft-deep in the slashed doublet.

* * * * * *

Sir Folly stood in the sunshine, brooding over the gay corpse. Some one touched his arm. It was the little maid.

"Run," she said; "he is quite dead."

"Then," answered the Jester, with his usual air, "he will make love no more. We will go, sweeting, lest the Law and the Church lay hands on us for slaying their Defender. But stay."

He drew out inkhorn and pen, and wrote busily. When he had finished he thrust the scrap of parchment on to the haft of the knife. Then he took his sister's hand and strode into the copse.

The impaled parchment fluttered stiffly in the wind like a flag. On it was written:—

"Beneath soft silk
And flashing star,
Princes' dark breasts
All heartless are."

AN IDYLL OF MAMMON

"I HATED ALL MY LABOUR WHEREIN I HAD LABOURED."

Ecclesiastes (*The Original*).

AN IDYLL OF MAMMON.

"JOHN BARRINGTON: sweetstuffs wholesale and retail." Ten years ago John Barrington had had that succinct inscription painted over the front of a tiny shop in Little Japan Street, and he could ill afford the thirty-five shillings it cost. When its letters first shone out upon Little Japan Street they were bright with yellow gold-leaf and gorgeous crimson; to-day they were scarcely distinguishable from the dingy black which constituted the external tint of John Barrington's business establishment. But as their gilded faces faded, and their blood-red perspective grew dim, the hoarded sovereigns gathered and waxed heavy in John Barrington's dinted cash-box. The neat wooden boxes of confectionery overflowed into first

one room and then another of the squat dark house, and a glass roof shot out over the cramped yard in the rear, all because John Barrington was a man of push and quiet energy, and because Fortune smiled upon his ventures.

These many years had John Barrington stood behind his own counter, or sat at the screened desk on its window-end during the greater part of the day. For, fast as his more important transactions multiplied, he could not afford to despise the pennies and halfpennies that lay within the disbursement of the children of Little Japan Street. In school-time, and when his retail business hours came to an end, he worked hard over the orders of his wholesale clients, and on Sundays he balanced his books and made out his invoices. On Bank Holidays he took stock.

To look at, John Barrington was comely enough, being unbent and straight of limb, despite all his stooping, having bright eyes, a delicately-moulded chin, and a Viking nose.

As a whole, indeed, he was strikingly Norse, for his head—itself spare and compact—was set squarely and somewhat loftily on a pair of small-boned, muscular shoulders. The one seemed somehow to suggest—in ghostly completion of an artistic *ensemble*—the light winged helmet of the old sea-kings, the other their close-fitting, troll-forged mail. Only, instead of being fair and crisply curling, his hair was dark and fine, with a gentle ripple in its raven masses. His eyes were as blue and his skin was as fair as those of a princess in a fairy story.

There was English blood in his veins, but not more than a wine-glassful or two; the rest was Italian and Spanish. And far back on his dead mother's side—she had been a Neapolitan—was the hot blue blood of the Goths flowing down from Odin himself. John Barrington was a racial hybrid, and, speaking artistically, he was an unqualified success. How such a man could endure to toil over cash-book and ledger was a mystery. And yet not quite a mystery. The fascination

of buccaneering is no more. Chains and gibbets and the dominion of the respectable in human life were too strong for it. But for those with the blood of the sea-thieves in their veins, there is an amplitude of romance still to be found in the walks of commerce. Craft and cunning, *esprit* and *verve*, the tenacity of the sleuth- and the courage of the boar-hound can still find occupation—even if ignoble occupation—in a commonplace business career. When John Barrington entered upon his tenancy of the shop in Little Japan Street, he had five pounds and three halfpence. Now he was probably worth from two to three thousand pounds. Yet, to be fair to him, he did not care—never had cared—a rush for a single sovereign. It was the joy of getting it which was sweet to him. He was a modern Viking on *terra firma*, a *fin de siècle* land-pirate.

Recently—because the wholesale business was showing itself distinctly more profitable, and offered more tempting opportunities for that Napoleonic finance in miniature which

was dear to the heart of John Barrington, and not because he was growing in the least degree indolent—he had relinquished attendance upon the counter, and had engaged an assistant.

Why so grave and pre-occupied a man as John Barrington should have chosen to delegate this part of his work to a person of the feminine gender, will never be quite satisfactorily ascertained. It is usual, of course, to employ such people in the sweet-shop line, but among those who replied to John Barrington's shilling advertisement in the *Telegraph*, there were many eligible young folk of his own sex, who, in addition to attending to the counter, could have aided John Barrington with the manual labour of the wholesale department. There was even one youth who understood book-keeping, and who would have been content with a nominal salary in view of possible promotion. John Barrington admired the insight and commercial acumen of this applicant, but dismissed him curtly.

When Margaret—for convenience abbreviated to the monosyllabic "Madge"—Smith appeared timorously upon the scene, John Barrington merely looked at her undemonstratively, inquired her previous experience, and appointed her forthwith. Then the currents of both lives flowed on side by side, silently, formally, in a routine that was delightful to the man, mechanical to the girl.

John Barrington had not engaged the services of Madge in preference to those of a member of the sterner sex from motives of masculine weakness. He never noticed her except to issue his instructions. Nor was his choice of her to be set down to motives of economy. He paid his feminine *aide* two pounds a week, and did not evince by look or word that he was doing anything unusual. If he had been all English instead of the international organism that he was, Madge would most certainly have had to be content with less than a sixth of that amount. If by any possibility this postulated all-English John Barrington had given her ten shillings,

he would have been intoxicated with a sense of virtue. The actual John Barrington paid her two golden sovereigns, and handed them into the little palm each Saturday night with the satisfied air of a well-to-do merchant settling a heavily-discounted invoice.

Being set free from the counter, John Barrington devoted his Saturday afternoon to his ledgers and accounts. When his assistant came back from her tea, it was his custom to leave her in charge of the shop, and, retiring to the dusky parlour behind, to plunge into his books for the rest of the evening. This, however, did not release him from his Sunday work upon them, for the wholesale orders increased so rapidly that the additional time was fully needed.

Along the even tenour of this quiet way John Barrington and his *employée* proceeded for some six months, and then the former became aware that in the vague *concerto* of voices which floated to him from the shop on these same Saturday nights, one waxed familiar to his ear, and that one not the voice

of Madge. It proceeded unmistakably from a masculine throat, and was a youthful baritone, capable of modulating itself into tender tones and caressing syllables. John Barrington grew uneasy, and for the first time in his life found it impossible to concentrate his attention upon the pages of his ledger in the fashion which had enabled him for years to do the work of a whole staff of clerks.

One Saturday he got up and set the door stealthily apart. He could see into the shop. Madge stood behind the counter sewing, the coarse brown holland of the material gathered up over her wrists and bosom in that womanly fashion which is so unreasonably appealing to the lonely masculine heart. On the shopward side of the counter a young man sat with his elbows on the scratched and bruised veneer, his chin upon his knuckles, and his eyes turned up to Madge.

John Barrington listened, and as he listened his Gothic blood sprang into its old fifth-century heat with a rapidity that made him

reel under a mad Berserk desire to take the unoffending youth by the neck from behind, get a knee planted against his lumbar vertebræ, and strain him backwards until his spine snapped like a faulty lance. Where John Barrington, a man of peaceful life, got this accurate knowledge of an ancient means for disposing of inconvenient sentinels, I do not know. Suffice it that if that wild Gothic blood had had its way, the guileless stripling would have had his lovemaking stopped for evermore.

"Madge," he was saying, "you are very cruel. You made me love you, and now you won't love me."

"I did nothing of the kind," exclaimed Madge indignantly. "I never said a single word to you that the whole world mightn't hear."

"No," admitted the love-sick Romeo, sadly, "but you looked at me, and my heart was yours from that moment."

"*Pshaw!*" returned Madge.

"Madge," persisted the repulsed one, with

a significant tremor in his voice, "Madge, couldn't you care for me a little?"

"No!" said Madge.

"Not a very little?"

Madge shook her head decisively.

"Not in time?"

"No," repeated Madge severely, "and I think if you were a gentleman you wouldn't torment me with this sort of talk when I've told you I don't like it. There are other women besides me. Go away and make love to someone else! I daresay there are plenty of good girls who would make you very happy"—Madge was not in the least embarrassed—"so go, please, for it's time to close."

"May I put up the shutters for you?" inquired her rejected suitor, still in the same pathetic tone.

"No," said Madge practically; "they don't put up, *it* pulls down with a pole, and Mr. Barrington does it. He will be out in a minute, and"—with a wicked inspiration—"if he catches you here, he'll——"

"I see," concluded her wooer, vindictively,

"you want to be mistress of old Barrington's money: I wish you joy of the brute," and so ungallantly departed.

If ever that young man's spine was in danger of sudden fracture, it was at that moment. But John Barrington, being in some trifling degree—at least, externally—civilised, restrained himself with difficulty.

Madge being a real girl, and not a stage one, did not weep or faint, but turned fiery red, gave a distinct stamp with her foot, and said prosaically, "The nasty, spiteful thing!"

What more she might have said was cut short by the entrance of her employer, who regarded her obvious blushes—not without a ridiculous satisfaction—and proceeded to "close" for the night.

"You can leave one light on, Madge," he directed in even a colder tone than usual, and retired into the parlour.

When Madge had made all tidy, she followed him to receive her week's pay.

She found him crouched in his big chair by the fire, with a ledger on his knees. He

had broken the fire into a blaze, extinguished his customary lamp, and had lighted every burner in a large chandelier, usually lost to view in the twilight which, summer and winter, inhabited the room. He looked up when she went in.

"Madge," he asked, "do you mind making me some supper? I feel rather strange, or I would get it myself. I usually do."

Madge's heart welled up into her eyes at the thought of those lonely, comfortless meals.

"With pleasure," she answered, using a conventional phrase in her confusion, and half choking with pity.

He mistook her tone.

"Don't, if you have somewhere else to go," he said.

"But I haven't," responded Madge, and set about her task.

Dust, dust everywhere—harrowing up her housewifely soul. In a cupboard she found eggs and a few slices of ham, and set the pan with some of the latter on—or rather half on—the fire, while she laid the cloth upon a

portion of the clumsy square table. To think of a man doing work which is properly that of her sex is always pitiful to a woman, especially if the man be a solitary one, and Madge, by way of compensation, put a good deal of tenderness into the laying of that cloth and supper.

John Barrington watched her hungrily. She was only a bright little shop girl, with limpid eyes, small, deft hands and light feet. But ten years' fasting had sprung into appetite in John Barrington's breast, and the very rustle of a woman's skirts seemed to mock the objects for which he had given so large a slice of his life. He added up the column of his ledger in which he had set down each year's profits. The total came to two thousand pounds. Two thousand pounds! The old nature sprang up in him, and asserted that two thousand pounds was worth having—as it unquestionably is. But he looked up and caught sight of Madge as she bent over the fire pouring the hot water into the tea-pot; a whiff of the fragrant herb came to his

nostrils, and, lo, all the solitude of those ten years rolled back on him like a flood. He seemed to be miles away from the homely scent of that preparing meal, and the earnest face of the attendant handmaiden swam before his eyes.

"There, it is ready, Mr. Barrington," said Madge, "and I must go."

She possessed herself of the scrap of paper in which John Barrington, with rare consideration, always wrapped her week's wages, and slipped it into her pocket. Then she threw on her cloak and caught up her hat, but paused a moment to look with pride at the cosy table and to give an additional poke to the fire.

"Good-night, Mr. Barrington," she remarked, with her hand on the door.

John Barrington got up, stumbled awkwardly across to the cupboard, took out another knife, plate, cup and saucer, and spoon, and set them on the table.

"Madge," he said, "you'll stay."

Madge flushed with an embarrassing sense of propriety.

"Oh, no!" she replied.

He mistook her again.

"Very well," he said dryly; "good-night," and she went away.

"Dear me," she observed when she got to the shop-door, "I've forgotten my umbrella, and it's raining."

She went back hastily into the parlour, but stopped on the threshold, surprised. John Barrington had not moved towards his supper. It lay growing cold—a woeful sight to a woman's eyes—and he sat with his face in his hands.

She thought he was ill, and ran fearfully across. He did not move, and she touched his shoulder. He raised his head, and she saw that there were great tears upon his cheeks and on his open palms.

Madge's eyes met his, and she burst out crying.

"Oh, I'll stop! I'll stop!" she said, and flung herself at his feet.

* * * *

And so that supper was eaten after all.

A SON OF THE MORNING

"THESE ARE THEY WHICH WERE NOT DEFILED WITH WOMEN, FOR THEY ARE VIRGINS. THESE ARE THEY WHICH FOLLOW THE LAMB."

The Apocalypse.

A SON OF THE MORNING.

GABRIEL'S Watch-tower looks out over the Universe from the furthest spur of the Celestial City. A long arrow-flight behind it the clustering domes and pinnacles rise from the green, and climb, drawing more and more closely together, up the gentle slopes towards the Alp-like summit, from whence, wrapped in insufferable glory, looks down the Great White Throne.

Overhead there is a sky of cloudless blue, the murmur of the River whispers in the air, and the faintest of June zephyrs steals across the City in the warm beauty of its everlasting noon. Below the broad battlements the snowy cliffs dip down into fleecy clouds. Above, behind, around, a quiet radiance hangs its impenetrable veil between the sight and the worlds outside the City. Only at

that distant spur of green where Gabriel's Tower stands far beyond the line of the flanking wall, the halo breaks, the clouds end, and the black night of illimitable space lies open to the eye. None but Gabriel passes through the tiny postern which opens upon the woods that shut off the solitary column from the City; none but Gabriel ascends its myriad steps; none but Gabriel watches from its chill platform the circling sweep of sun and satellite over the inky vault of Infinity.

Far across the expanse of pinnacle and cupola, where the tall Gates gleam dazzlingly in the brooding splendour, the World-road grows up through a sleeping sea of clouds. That way come and go all who enter and leave the City, and the rolling mists which haunt it shut out all view of whatsoever may lie beneath. Only Gabriel keeps watch over the Universe beyond—Gabriel of the piteous, searching eyes and the red-gold hair. What he sees he tells to none of the City folk. Once in the full circle of the flying hours—

those heavenly hours which are but seconds of our earthly time—he comes from his tower to the City, and ascends into that Glory which slumbers about the Throne. When he passes through the stately thoroughfares to go up with the tale of what he has seen since last he trod that path, his face is drawn and anguished as with unutterable woe, and there falls on the peaceful City-folk a shadow of something strange—the shadow of despairing sorrow. They turn to watch him as he goes heavily up the gleaming marble of the mighty stairway into the Ineffable Light of the Presence, and until he descends, his face once more composed and trustful, the ecstasy of the unending noontide seems touched with a breath of wistfulness and saddened by a vague unrest. But an aureole lingers about his brows as he turns again to his vigil across the wide ways of the Celestial City, and the white-robed folk bless him as he goes.

"*Let not Hope die*," they say, "*Gabriel*."

"*Nor Love fail*." he returns steadfastly, and passes on.

"*Until the End*," they answer him, and the City is comforted.

* * * * * *

Gabriel does not always watch. Sometimes he departs upon high embassies; sometimes the burden of his seeing is sore upon him, and he lays himself down by the River of Life for a season, weary even unto death. It is a grievous task to watch God's Universe through but a single cycle of its throbbing hours. Anguish and torment, sin and bitterness, wherever those grey eyes look down from that lonely tower. And though some few of the purposes which guide the motions of the gigantic mechanism are comprehended by Gabriel, none—save One—knows whereunto it labours, or what its task may be. So Gabriel has gazed and grieved—grieved and gazed a thousand years.

* * * * * *

Thus much wrote Ali Ibn Ali, in crabbed Arabic characters, and with many a quaint

periphrasis and circumlocution, the year that Haroun al Raschid died. Orientalists have remarked his curious references to the Great White Throne and Holy City of our own Apocalypse, and have speculated thereon. Olsson—Van Olsson of that daring journey across Thibet in the dawn of Eastern exploration—Oudin, Colles, and the English Draper knew of the fragment—whether poetry or myth—and noted down its existence in their journals. It is to be found in the Commentaries of Ali Ibn Ali upon the Koran of Mohammed the Prophet—a short paragraph in a very dry and threadbare discourse. Whether Ali was quoting *sans* acknowledgment, like some preachers of the present day, or whether a flash of fancy illumined that gloomy old Asiatic brain, will never be known. There the passage stands, in its way quite a small mystery. I had read it over the other night where it stands in the preface to Schloesser's "Israel." That pathetic greeting between the Watcher and the people of the City lingered in my brain: "*Let not*

Hope die, Gabriel," in a murmured harmony of gentle voices; "*Nor Love fail,*" in the grave, tender tones of the sorrowful angel; and then the yearning echo of the chorus, with its intonation of wistful confidence, "*Until the End—until the End.*" I took up my violin and played on in the dusk until all the house was still, and only the wind stirred as it whispered with the elder-tree under my window. Then the story of Gabriel the Watcher seemed to go on in my brain as though it were being spoken in my ear.

* * * * * *

Gabriel the Watcher went down from the Celestial City to the little planet Earth. Of all the sad worlds that there are in the terrible Universe there is none sadder than the Earth, save only one—the Place of Destruction. Gabriel came to a squalid court in a London slum, and whispered an inspiration into a poor man's ear. And that whisper changed the whole history of the Earth. Such are Gabriel's embassies.

As the Angel passed along the terrestrial ways he came to a tiny village, deep in a Provençal wood. It was a pleasant corner of the Universe, and the Watcher flung himself down on a patch of greensward under a drooping bough: Peace laid her gracious fingers upon his forehead, and he forgot, for one moment, the sorrow of the Universe, and the solitary tower on the confines of the Celestial City.

Sweet are the sunbeams lying
Warmly on hill and shore:
Sweet are the songs—each vying
With each—the birds outpour.

The Angel looked up. The voice of the singer was growing nearer. It seemed to be just round the bend of the lane. It went on gaily:—

Sweet are the looks—love-laden—
Of unforgotten eyes;
Sweet the awaited maiden
To him who grasps the prize.

There was a pause as of caught breath, a

shrill cry, and as the Watcher sprang up a girl flew frantically past him with one in hot pursuit. The Watcher put out a finger-tip: the man staggered and dropped like a lump of clay.

The girl turned and came back. She was a slight creature, with changeful dark eyes—the eyes of a fawn. She wore a gay costume of many-coloured silks, with innumerable ends of ribbon about it. Her graceful figure was as undulant as a swan's neck, and as delicate. Her cheeks were red, her mouth and chin bewitching in their almost childish piquancy of expression.

Gabriel looked at her, and Love entered into his heart. He turned his face to the blue heavens, and his seraphic vision saw across the infinite spaces the white shores of the Celestial City, with its rainbow Gates and the brooding glory about the Throne.

"*Give me, oh, Almighty—give me, for a little space, humanity.*"

The voiceless cry was heard. There was a faint sob in the air, and a silent answer:

"*Thou hast thy will.*"

And the maid looked up and saw a youth with passionate deep eyes, and red-gold hair that curled about his forehead and temples.

* * * * * *

The Watcher was tending his vines in the flush of the early morning. Behind him lay the modest homestead where he had brought his love. Odorous Southern roses clustered about its windows and porchway, and the vines ran up its walls and flung themselves over the roof. The soil smelled sweet in the breath of the young day, still cool with the chaste farewell of the night. Gabriel's heart was at rest, and he worked on amid the ripening grapes with a song upon his lips. It was not the song of the Spirits—the Chant of the Redeemed—the Anthem of the Throne—it was a simple earth-born melody that told of the sweetness of life and of passion :—

Sweet are the looks—love-laden—
Of unforgotten eyes.

"Gabriel!"

The song broke off suddenly as the Watcher's wife came out into the sunshine. He sprang from his stooping position and crossed to her.

"It is not warm enough for thee, sweetheart, this morning air," he said, as he kissed her cheek. "See," and he caught up his mantle, "I will wrap thee against the cold." He drew the cloak warmly about her, and she stood watching him at his work. Soon he looked up to smile at her.

"It is pleasant toil, this," he mused aloud. "After all, man was made a husbandman at the first, and loves the earth from very instinct. There is something comely, too, in this fostering of tender life," and he released a feeble shoot from a heavy clod of mould. "A man may do it and not be shamed."

"At that dry talk again, Gabriel," pouted the girl, with a stamp. "You might be a priest, I declare."

The Watcher winced.

"I am too serious for thee, little one, I

know. I will try and be merrier. Yet it is hard when one thinks of the strangeness of life, of all its sorrow and mystery."

"Gabriel!" burst out the girl, dropping the mantle from her shoulders, and throwing off her own loose robe, "don't talk like that. See, is not this pretty?"

She held up the corners of the parti-coloured skirt, and fell into a dainty pose.

The Watcher looked at her.

"It is thy old dancing dress, little one, is it not?"

"Ay," and she changed her attitude, and looked at him archly. Then she tripped across to him, and put her hands about his arm and her head on his shoulder.

"They want me to dance at the village *fête*," she said, "and I am going in this."

The Watcher reeled as men do under a blow.

"There," she told him bitterly, "I knew you wouldn't like it—you never like the things that I do. Why *will* you be so sour and grave? Can't you be like Carl Thord? He

is the life of all the *fêtes*—he is so free and happy."

The Watcher took her hands from his arm and held her from him. He looked into her face in a dazed way.

"Like Carl Thord," he murmured slowly—"like Carl Thord?"

"Yes, sneer at him if you like! Carl Thord is a very nice fellow, and a great deal pleasanter——"

Gabriel put up his hand, brown with the Provençal soil.

"No, no," he cried, "not that——"

"*S-sh!*" she said,breaking into his passionate sentence as he had broken into hers. She put her hand to her ear.

The Watcher listened. Far up the road which ran past the vineyard there was a splash of red, and the sound of singing floated down to them :—

> Sweet are the looks—love-laden—
> Of unforgotten eyes;
> Sweet the awaited maiden
> To him who grasps the prize.

Gabriel caught his breath in a quick sob.

"That is your song, Yvette," he said.

"Yes," she replied hardily. "It is Carl Thord. I taught it him the other night at the *cabaret*."

Gabriel stepped back and looked at her with the old sorrowful look growing in his eyes.

"Taught—it—him . . . in the *cabaret?*" he repeated.

"Yes," she said, and swept her gaudy raiment aside with a shapely foot and ankle, "and I danced for him—so—"

She went off into a swaying, undulating poem of motion—ribbons flying, hair afloat on the breeze caused by her own swift gestures, feet twinkling amid a gauzy flutter of silk and lace, her arms now thrown forward in a coaxing caress, now flung behind in the exquisite backward curve of the whole figure. Quicker and quicker grew the *accelerando* of the twinkling feet, till the shaken skirts sang in a continuous rustle of agitation—quicker, quicker, quicker, and then—*tap* with hands

and heels at once, and the dancer stood statuesque in the last pose.

She stood waiting his applause.

"*Brava, brava,* say *brava,* Gabriel," she cried petulantly.

Gabriel stood watching the splash of red as it came nearer. It was Carl Thord, in a scarlet cap and blouse, bound for the *fête.*

"*Like Carl Thord!*" Gabriel reiterated in a horrified whisper.

"Well," Yvette said, with pique in her voice, "what can you see wrong about him?"

The Watcher caught her wrist in a grip of steel.

"See? see?" he exclaimed in a fierce undertone. "Listen, I will tell you. I see a spirit gay because it has ceased to be capable of goodness or repentance; a soul loathsome with foul thoughts and fouler appetites; a being vile below the vileness of the things that crawl in rotting flesh; a life stained with falsehood and betrayal, lust and dishonour. That is what I see in Carl Thord. *Like him!*—Almighty Father—she says *like him!*"

He flung up his arms to the placid sky, and cried out upon God.

Yvette frowned, and then laughed.

"You see that in him," she said mockingly; "what do you see in me?"

The Watcher studied her intently.

"I cannot tell," he answered. "Love blinds my eyes. I cannot see into you as I see into others."

"Look again," she commanded, and made the wanton salute with her tiny foot, sweeping her skirts aside as though to dance.

Gabriel gazed at her, and the sadness waxed in his eyes. Suddenly he covered them with his hands.

Yvette laughed, and began to dance. "You see now?" she said, and went on dancing.

Gabriel took his hands from his face and looked at her a long second. Then he tottered and fell.

"Yvette!"—it was the voice of Carl Thord—"they wait at the *fête* for you."

"I am coming—coming," she called, and ran off! then paused abruptly, and came

back. Gabriel moved somewhat and sighed. She caught up his mantle and laid it over him. Then she ran down to the road and joined Carl Thord.

* * * * * *

When the Watcher came to his senses it was high noon, and he lay in his rough peasant chamber. The priest stood by, regarding him sadly.

"Where is Yvette?" asked the Watcher, starting up.

"Gabriel, my son——" the priest began, but the Watcher turned his face to the wall.

"I know, good father," he said; "I know——"

There was a little sigh in the air.

"*Wilt have back thy angelhood, Gabriel?*"

And Gabriel bowed his head and ceased to be man.

* * * * * *

The World-road winds up to the Great

White Throne unseen by Gabriel from his Watch-tower. It is the only part of the Universe that he cannot scan. The Road to the Place of Destruction sweeps right down under his eyes beneath the furthest spur of the City.

* * * * * *

Yvette came up the World-road over against the glare of the Throne, and stood dazzled. The Light shimmered and changed as opals do in the moon-rays. Presently it grew still, a steady, unwavering glow. Then it was said:

"*Yvette.*"

And Yvette answered "My Lord," and cowered from the Light.

In the silence and the glory the words of her sentence fell like drops of molten lead.

"*Thou hast chosen the lowest, even though that which was highest chose thee. Fair thou wast, and foul hast thou made thyself. As thou hast chosen so be it. Get thee unto thine own place.*"

And Yvette went down toward the Road of the Place of Destruction.

* * * * * *

Yvette had come to where the sphere of radiance that hides the Holy City breaks under Gabriel's Watch-tower. There it rose, dark against that distant glimpse of the Eternal Splendour which is the parting agony of the condemned. On its lonely summit stood Gabriel, and the Universe swung by beneath and around him.

And between the Woman and the Angel hung a frightful void of space.

A spirit came running down the Road of the Place of Destruction—a spirit vile and hideous. As it passed Yvette it snarled and bit at her. And the voice was the voice of Carl Thord.

Yvette shrank back, and cried out.

"Gabriel, Gabriel!" she shrieked fearfully.

The shape on the distant pinnacle turned, and Yvette knew that she was seen.

"*Gabriel, Gabriel!*" she wailed in a spasm of terror.

The Watcher stepped upon the parapet of his tower, and looked behind him at the Celestial City, crowned with the Insupportable Lustre of the Presence. Very fair it looked, its domes and cupolas shining in the intense brilliance, the jewelled Gates marking the silver battlements with a blot of gorgeous flame. Below him was the cold darkness of space, and the pitiless mechanism of the great Universe. Yet Gabriel spread his wings and sank down, down, a speck of white upon the blackness of Infinite Space, the lordliest of all the Seraphs of the Holy City, self-exiled from the Presence for ever and for ever.

And Yvette laughed to think of her power.

* * * * * *

Gabriel's Tower looks out solitarily over the Universe, but another seraph mounts its myriad steps, to watch the pendulum swing of the Universe beneath, and it is another seraph who comes down out of the Glory of the Throne, and greets the people as they call to him :—

"*Let not Hope die.*"

"*Nor Love fail,*" the strange seraph answers, and the people think of Gabriel and answer together with a wistful sadness—

"*Until the End—until the End.*"

But the End is not yet.

TANTALUS

"DIVINATIONS, AND SOOTHSAYINGS, AND DREAMS, ARE IN VAIN; AND THE HEART FANCIETH, AS A WOMAN'S HEART IN TRAVAIL."

The Son of Sirach.

TANTALUS.

"*Pah!*" said the Novelist, flinging down his pen in disgust.

He had just dipped it in the newly-filled inkpot, and the rolling wooden stem, pointed with metal, left an irregular smear upon his manuscript. He took up his blotting-paper and dried the stains moodily. They lay athwart a page of scarred and interlined "copy," whose sentences, difficult to follow in the Novelist's rapid scrawl, would yet, printed, kindle many a tender picture in the brain of the eager reader. Since early morning the Novelist's pen had travelled swiftly over sheet after sheet towards the end of his concluding chapter, until, in the height of the glowing August afternoon, he had written the final sentences, and discarded the insensible though potent interpreter of his thoughts with an exclamation of offended weariness.

He looked up and across his littered desk. The sun poured down into the small yard at the rear of his sitting-room. A scantily-foliaged tree thrust itself over the slip of brickwork which divided his landlady's "garden" from that at the rear of the adjoining premises; a cat or two lay about on the top of the outlying ramifications of wall, and a stray sparrow hopped dustily upon a swinging branch just out of reach.

The vision that the Novelist had been putting into words faded slowly from his brain.

A huge mountain, snow-crowned, greenly sloping to the wide plains at its base. The murmur of rivulet and waterfall, the vibrant note of insect life, the rustle of the grasses, are in the air. On a gentle declivity, over which the wandering zephyr of the hillsides breathes fitfully, a man and a woman are sitting side by side. Her hat is off, her brown hair ruffled by the climb and by the impish breezes that blow upon the eastern spurs by

which they have come. A cluster of wild flowers droops at her breast, a spray of grey-veined mountain ivy at her belt. Her eyes are blue, and, at the moment, mischievous. She pokes a stalk of feathery grass beneath her companion's straw hat, and laughs at his start of surprise. The mountain winds take up her arch merriment, and scatter it to the echoes of a hundred gorges and ravines. The man at her side takes her hand into his and captures the tormenting thing. They are children playing together, he and she. They have waited and struggled for long years, these two; they have come through toil and weariness, heat and cold, scorn and contumely, each for the other's sake. And now, lo! the Novelist's Art is satisfied, they have passed over Jordan, and are entered into their Canaan. The sun shines on them, the earth murmurs to them, the winds and the waters sing to them . . . . "He leadeth them through Green Pastures."

And the Novelist was weary.

"Bah!" he said, looking out into the dismal garden at the cats and the swaying sparrow, "what good is it all?"

It was a trite question, and the Novelist felt it as such. He amplified it fretfully.

"Why should I go on creating women for other people to fall in love with? Why, indeed, should I create heroes at all? What a gallery of heroines I have brought into existence, only to bestow each in turn upon some imaginary Romeo! There was *Margery* —fair mistress *Margery* of my first successful novel; there was *Elsie*—sweet, winsome *Elsie*, of *The Sandhills;* grave, grey-eyed *Ruth*, of *The Third Chance;* golden-locked, cynically-tender *Maud*, of *A Social Quixote.* I breathed into all of them the breath of life, and then, when I longed to keep them for myself, I had to cudgel helpmeets for them out of my rebellious brains, and deliver them up gracefully in the closing chapter. Positively, I feel jilted every time I write 'Finis,' and look round at my dismal, womanless abode. Ah, if I could only marry one of my own creations!"

The Novelist's eyes wandered over the details of his disorderly, paper-strewn den as he rambled on. Dusty, lonely, dreary, with a dreariness only emphasised by the sunshine pouring across the motes in the close atmosphere of the room. Oh, for some woman to hover about it, with her cosy little ways; to kindle the fire—never mind if it was August—to make the kettle boil, to clear the round table of its piled volumes and spread a white cloth on it with bread and butter and tea, and, perhaps, strawberries from Covent Garden; to sit behind her tea-cups, laughing at his soberness, and coming round from her place to smooth the wrinkles out of his forehead, even with kisses! Oh, for such a one, after the last cup of tea was drunk, to settle down beside him caressingly, as women can, and talk—wisely, merrily, tenderly, while the glow of the fire fought with the gleam of the sunshine dying away beyond the chimney-pots! A *serrement de cœur* came over the Novelist, as the vision reached its climax, and he sighed heavily. He could put it all on

paper, he could even make himself the hero, with brown hair instead of black, blue eyes instead of dark hazel, and the name of De Vere instead of simple Smith. But "Finis" must be written just the same, and he must wake up to find himself in the dingy room looking on to the grey walls and chimney-cowls. Again the Novelist sighed, and closed his eyes through sheer weariness.

A touch upon his hand made him open them again. A little creature sat beside him on a buffet dragged up from the fireplace. He looked at her wonderingly as she took his hand in hers and laid her cheek upon it.

"Don't you know who I am?" she asked.

"You are *Elsie*, no, you are *Margery*, no, you are *Ruth*, no, *Maud*——"

"Yes," replied his visitor, "I am all of them and yet none of them. I am your Ideal Woman."

The Novelist put out his arms and clasped

them about her, but he could only feel a cold, bitter wind, and his arms held empty air.

He gazed speechlessly into vacancy for a moment until she grew upon his sight again, sitting in her old position upon the footstool at his side.

"You can't touch me," said the Ideal Woman, sadly. "I can touch you, but if you put out your arms I vanish away. I am only a kind of dream."

"You are very small," answered the Novelist, softly. He feared she would vanish again.

"All your women are small," said his Ideal. "Don't you remember how angry you were when Quiller-Couch said in the *Speaker* that you were a second *Rochester*, and loved women of the little and passionate variety?"

"I think I remember," mused the Novelist, "but I pointed out to him that there was *Alicia* in *The Ace of Spades*. *She* was a big woman."

"Bah!" said his Ideal, scornfully, "she was only a second fiddle. You were far fonder of *Barbara*, the school-girl. You married her to the poor Journalist, while you only gave *Alicia* the Duke. You always pose for those poor journalist and struggling civil-engineer parts yourself."

"*S-sh!*" whispered the Novelist, looking round, "you know too much, you witch."

The Ideal Woman laughed.

"I ought to," she said, "considering that I have sat for you to draw from for many a long year now. Do you remember"—she patted his hand with a childish *camaraderie*—"do you remember *Dulcie*, the little flower-girl in the first novel you ever tried? You saw it in a drawer the other day, and you took it up and looked at the page where *Regie Harris* gives *Dulcie* a sovereign for her roses. I was *Dulcie*, and you—you were *Regie Harris*."

"*S-s-sh*," warned the Novelist, "if a *Saturday Reviewer* were to hear!"

The Ideal Woman was alarmed.

"I hope there isn't one for miles," she said.

"It was after one poked fun at you about me that you wrote *The Ace of Spades*. You made *Alicia*, the heroine, very tall and very statuesque. But she wasn't really the heroine. *Barbara* was the heroine, and I was *Barbara*. But you hurt my feelings very much. I am used to having first place."

"What is your name, my—my——

The Ideal Woman waited.

"—— my darling," finished the Novelist.

"Oh," laughed the Ideal Woman, "I am all aliases. I have no real name—as I told you, I am a sort of dream."

"Very well, then," said the Novelist, "I will call you 'Dream.' But shall I never meet you as a reality?"

The Ideal Woman bent her head, and there was a sound as of someone weeping.

"N—no," she returned sadly, "never. You see I am the creature of your moods. My abiding characteristics—my individuality—are just the reflection of yours. Yet I change from grave to gay as you change. So I always suit you. But no woman ever does

that. If I were real I would not be myself. Therefore you can never meet me. I am your picture shown as a woman in the looking-glass of your own genius. You cannot get into a looking-glass."

"*Alice* did," objected the Novelist.

"*Alice* was a woman," said the Ideal one.

"But is there no one like you in the whole world?" inquired the Novelist.

"There is someone like me as I am now," said the Ideal Woman, "but perhaps no one like me as I may be when your mood changes to a new one."

The Novelist was silent.

"Doesn't it make you feel lonely?" murmured the Ideal Woman, with a sob. "I don't know what I should do if I hadn't you. I wish I *were* real."

"Are you real enough to kiss?" asked the Novelist.

"I don't know,"—the Ideal Woman's cheek flushed prettily. "Do you believe in me very much?"

"More than in myself," said the Novelist.

"Then I think you may try," conceded the Ideal Woman.

The Novelist leant over, and, putting his arms about the figure seated at his side, kissed her forehead, white beneath its loose masses of hair. But the Ideal Woman put up her mouth, and the Novelist felt like one who, with shut eyes, buries his face in roses.

He shivered strongly and suddenly. The Ideal Woman was gone.

"Come back, come back," he cried, but nothing stirred except a little mouse behind the skirting-board. And the room seemed very lonely and very cold.

THE WOOING OF LADY GODIVA

"A CERTAIN BLIND MAN SAT BY THE WAY-SIDE."

The Journey to Jerusalem.

THE WOOING OF LADY GODIVA.

JUST where the High Street—having wound some four or five hundred yards past the last miniature shop of the village—plunged down into the hollow, a solitary house stood on the level and looked out over the country. It was an old house, tall and narrow, and covered with stucco, painted olive-green by the flight of time.

Its antique front rose abruptly from the inner margin of the plain earth side-walk, to which two worn steps led down from the deeply-embayed door set between square stucco pillars. On right and left, behind a couple of strips of high grey wall, lay squares of garden and orchard, the trees in which leaned over to shelter the road-way. On the right of the house-door was a window, rather

more than shoulder-high, and in front of this window, at the furthur edge of the parapet, stood a great lime-tree. In the autumn one had to wade through the sea of fallen leaves to reach the ancient steps, which ran out like a blunt jetty. A stone's throw one way was the sharp brow of the hill, a stone's throw the other, the bend of the street running on into the village. At the bottom of the hill the road took a quick turn to the left, and buried itself in greenery on its way to Coventry Chase. Behind the house an outlying spur of the Chase woods shot up a background of dense foliage. In front of it, across the road, began a range of softly-rolling meadow lands that swept off to where the Giant rose against the sky, hurling their emerald spray half way up his gaunt sides.

It was late in May. The sun had hardly begun to gain strength, and the dew was yet dancing on the lime-tree's pointed leaves, and on the tiny flowerets of the lilacs and laburnums that thrust their feathery arms against its boughs. There was in the atmosphere

that feeling of fresh gaiety, the contagion of which it is impossible to resist. The scent of the morning blew warmly across the meadows, and the bird-gossip rippled in staccato chirps from tree to tree.

Suddenly a horse's measured hoof-beats broke upon the air, and a shapely sorrel cob rose over the crest of the road. A woman swayed easily in the saddle, with a gauntleted hand laid carelessly on the rein. She was small almost to disproportion, yet strangely fragile in appearance. Notwithstanding the thick riding-glove on her hand, it seemed diminutive enough for that of a child, and the shoe in the burnished stirrup-iron was more like an elfin's foot-gear than a clumsy human boot. Her habit was black, her scarlet hat resembled a Texan sombrero, and was caught up at the side with a snowy feather. In spite of its shadowing brim it might have been discovered that her elfish appearance was heightened by a pair of blue eyes, set under arched brows beneath masses of dark hair, and lighting up a complexion that was

unmistakably brunette. As the sorrel and his rider came demurely along the level in the sunshine, the sound of singing floated before them.

"My love is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
My love is like a melody
That's sweetly played in tune."

Under the cool shadow of the spreading lime, the singer paused and pushed back her hat.

"Lazy old Merlin!" she observed abstractedly to the cob, who flirted one ear acknowledgingly as his mistress began on the chorus:

"So fair is she, my bonny lass,
So deep in love am I——"

A piece of white paper fluttered down from the open window of the house at her elbow, and Merlin plunged nervously.

"Silly old Merlin!" cried the singer, with another break, and looked up.

A man sat at the window with a little sheaf

of documents in one hand. The other was groping on the sill.

Lady Godiva drew rein and dismounted, but a wilful zephyr caught the hapless thing and whirled it far into the meadow. A flush of petulant determination started into the oval face beneath the scarlet hat, and Lady Godiva lifted herself once more into the saddle, reined Merlin upon his haunches in the narrow road-way, launched him at the hedge, and landed laughing in the meadow. It was a keen pursuit, for a very Ariel of mischief had surely fastened upon that white leaf. Over two hedges, a ditch, and a five-barred gate flew Merlin, while the crimson of conflict rose in Lady Godiva's cheeks.

"Lazy old Merlin!" she said, shaking her reins reproachfully as they missed it a fourth time, and the cob woke under the unwonted rebuke and stirred his strain of racing blood to life.

Victory at last!—on the very verge of Coventry Chasm, Merlin set a lucky hoof upon the truant scrap of paper, and Lady

Godiva, dismounting with speed, impounded it triumphantly.

It was blank.

"*Bah!*" exclaimed Lady Godiva in a burst of scorn, and caught at the errant patch to destroy it. But her pink forefinger slipped over the paper instead of tearing it, and she felt that it was covered with tiny pin-pricks. Then she remembered how strangely the man from whose hand it had fluttered had groped upon the sill, and the reason of the pin-pricks flashed upon her. The man was blind, and this was his way of writing.

Lady Godiva took out her costly cambric kerchief, all scalloped and broidered, and wiped the page cautiously, taking heed not to press down any of the infinitesimal projections which formed the hieroglyphics. Then she put it into her bosom, and rode back with a vague pain of sympathy at her heart.

When she had landed Merlin deftly in the narrow road once more, she saw that the same figure sat at the window, still groping blindly for the missing scrap of paper. She walked

her horse between the lime-tree and the wall, and put it into his hand. As she did so she noticed that there were great tears running down his cheeks.

He fingered the paper a moment, and then motioned irritably in the air.

Lady Godiva pulled sharply at the curb, and the sorrel shifted his position noisily. The blind man's face lit up. It was a pale, tremulous face—the face of a comparatively young man, but lined by sickness, and by a deprivation sullenly borne. He was dressed, as far as Lady Godiva could see, in brown velvet quaintly cut. Around his neck he wore a violet silk scarf drawn through a thick gold ring. His hands were thin and graceful, with azure veins showing about the delicate knuckles.

Moved by his evident trouble and suspense, Lady Godiva put out her gloved hand, and the blind man touched it at the same moment that Merlin indicated their presence. The thin fingers fluttered over her own for a second, and then, finding with the quick sense of the

blind, that she wore a loose riding-gauntlet, he drew it off reverently, and kissed the warm white flesh.

"Thank you," he said respectfully.

Lady Godiva flushed hotly, and possessed herself of the dainty leather thing.

"It was nothing," she protested, confusedly, as she replaced it, half angry at him for venturing so daringly to acknowledge the service she had chosen to render him. "I am glad I caught the paper, since it is valuable."

"Caught it?" he repeated.

"We had quite a chase after it, Merlin and I. A wicked little breeze set its mind on having it, didn't it, Merlin?" she said, patting the sorrel in her confusion. He was making such a fuss about a trifle.

He took her hand again, slipped off the clinging envelope, and kissed the soft fingers passionately. A big drop fell burning from his eyes, and stung the fine skin.

She drew her hand away—but very gently—and re-captured her glove.

"You are Lady Godiva?" he inquired.

"And this is Merlin," she said, fretting the cob with her heel until he champed angrily at the bit. It was so silly to be asked one's name like a school-girl.

"You ride past often," the blind man went on. "Your horse's hoofs are the sweetest sound that breaks my silence. It must be pleasant out there in the sun. I wish I could see you. I know that you are small and dainty, and that you ride perfectly. What colour are your eyes?"

"My eyes are blue," answered Lady Godiva, brightly.

"What colour are mine?" he returned; "I never thought to ask till now."

Lady Godiva looked into his face. His eyes were large and lustrous, and, to all appearance, perfect. They were of a deep and uncommon hue, the tint that dyes the heart of a "Marmion" pansy.

"They are violet," she said, trying to speak easily, much puzzled by his manner, yet loth to wound him with a curt reply.

He was silent.

"That is writing on the paper, is it not?" she pursued by way of relief. "Those funny pin-pricks, I mean."

"Yes," he replied. "It is writing—writing that I would not part with for the world."

"Indeed!" murmured Lady Godiva.

"May I read it to you?" he said.

"If—if you like," she told him, embarrassed and playing with her rein. What was he going to read to her, this sad-faced man in velvet, with the violet eyes and scarf?

"You will not be angry?" he prefaced beseechingly, laying his hand gropingly upon hers.

"Why should I?" she parried.

"Of course," he agreed nervously, "why should you?" and read on, moving his finger-tips to and fro upon the slip of paper.

"Over my mystical dark
The scent of the lilac is blown,
With the delicate odour of hawthorn, o'er fields where
the grass is new grown.

And the room where I sit in the dark,
Is haunted by fragrances known
But to those unto whom the Three Sisters have given four senses alone.

"Sweet is the scent of the thorn,
Blown over the brooks as they run,
Sweeter the beat of the sorrel's swift feet, as my love rides past in the sun."

Lady Godiva moved her hand from where it lay on the rough sill, with his resting upon it.

"You are angry," he remarked, breaking off.

"You had no right——" began Lady Godiva, trying to be indignant.

He tore the paper into a score of fragments and tossed them to the wind.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

Lady Godiva rode out from under the lime-tree.

She came back.

"I am not angry," she condescended; "tell me, how did you know my horse was a sorrel?"

"How do I know that your hat is red, that

your hands and feet are the smallest in the world, that your mouth is rich and ripe, that your hair is like the heart of a storm-cloud, that your eyes flash and sparkle like the lightnings along its edge, that your ears are like the shells on a Pacific beach—how do I know these things? A woman told me."

He turned from the window, laughing harshly.

Lady Godiva galloped off, with her hand clenched on the curb, and a strange feeling beneath the trim bodice. Yet she did not know that it was at her heart. She only thought that she would like to know who the woman was that had told him all these things.

* * * * * *

A June storm. Skies black with swollen rain-clouds, trees plunging and tossing in the mighty gusts of a north-easter; meadow-land, ploughed field, and the distant Giant standing out intermittently in the vivid flashes of

lightning. Far up the road, at the bend of the village, a flying horse and rider, and glimpses of a red hat. Nearer and nearer came Merlin's rapid feet, and the blind man at his window heard and stirred, and, perchance, prayed to the Fates. The hoof-beats ceased beneath the great lime as the torrent burst in a Niagara of tempestuous downpourings.

The door of the solitary house opened, and the blind man appeared.

"Will you not come in, Lady Godiva?" he suggested, quietly. "It is not safe under that tree in this storm."

Lady Godiva gave herself a shake of petulance and dismounted.

"What about Merlin?" she pouted; "and I do not even know your name."

"Godfrey Silver." He answered her implied question first. "Merlin will take no serious harm."

As Lady Godiva ascended the narrow stairs the unwonted tremor fluttered at her heart once more; but so little did she

understand herself, that she mistook it for fear.

"You are not wet?" asked her host, standing aside for her to pass into the room, across whose raised window the rain drove noisily through the branches of the lime.

"No," she said, and glanced curiously out over the brown stone sill. She seemed to see a vision of herself looking gravely into the room from Merlin's back.

Godfrey Silver lowered the heavy sash, and, moving so quickly that she almost forgot his blindness, reached down from some dark cupboard a shallow silver kettle, filled it with water from a carafe, and lit the spirit-lamp beneath it. Then he set a cup and plate before her—a cup and plate of old Sèvres ware, such as kindles the fiercest passion of the antiquary—and brought out a purple cluster of hot-house grapes.

"I am not hungry," objected Lady Godiva; "really I am not."

"I see," he said, "you will not eat in my house," and took up the grapes.

"I must, after that," decided Lady Godiva, with a ripple of debonair laughter; "but these grapes are yours, are they not, and you are not well?"

"Your presence is my best medicine," said Godfrey Silver, his sightless violet eyes resting on her a moment.

Lady Godiva ate her grapes in silence, and drank the tea that he poured out for her. When he had served her, with a dumb animal wistfulness that brought tears into the blue eyes beneath the red hat, Godfrey Silver sat down on his couch, and listened to her every movement as though he would fain compensate by one sense for the lack of another.

"These are beautiful grapes," observed Lady Godiva, breaking the silence.

"I got them for you," confessed Godfrey Silver.

"For me!" she exclaimed, astonished.

"I knew you would come one day this week," he said. "The storm has been hanging over us for days, and I prayed for it to

break when you were passing, that I might consecrate my house with your presence. So I sent for the grapes to London. I knew you would come. I seem to know all about you, all you say, all you do."

He checked himself.

"I beg your pardon," he concluded abruptly.

"It has stopped raining," announced Lady Godiva.

"Are you so anxious to be gone?" he returned, sadly. "Well, so be it. Good-bye. I have at least had you once beneath my roof. I need not listen to your horse's hoofs as you pass, and think that that is all I possess of you. No, I can say to myself: Here in this chair she sat, out of this cup she drank, her dress brushed over this carpet, and her feet trod upon it. Go forth into your sunshine, Lady Godiva—the sunshine which is part of you—the sunshine in which you live. As for me, I thank you that you have made my darkness more precious to me than sight, and this poor house a palace of gracious memories."

Lady Godiva put out a hand and touched his arm. A sob broke from her lips.

"I understand," he said, "I distress you. I beg your pardon again. Can I show you downstairs?"

He took the hand which rested on his sleeve, dropped on one knee beside her chair in the courtly fashion which contrasted so pathetically with his blindness, and kissed the cold fingers. Then he moved to rise, but an arm stole about his shoulders, and a little face went down upon the velvet coat in a passion of tears.

* * * * * *

"Who was the woman, dear, who told you all about me?" demanded Lady Godiva, long after the fickle June sun had shone out once more.

"That was Polly," replied Godfrey Silver.

"And who is Polly?" inquired Lady Godiva.

For answer Godfrey went to the door and

called. A girl came silently in—a girl slender and dark-eyed, marvellously like Godfrey Silver.

"My sister," explained Godfrey.

"And mine," added Lady Godiva, kissing her.

THE TREASON OF JOHN SMITH

"THEY TAKE AWAY THE SHEAF FROM THE HUNGRY."

Job of Uz.

THE TREASON OF JOHN SMITH.

THE canal ran under John Smith's window. He called it his window because he had sat by it ever since he had entered the office. That was longer ago than he cared to remember, and always he had been able to lift his eyes from his ledger and see the black surface of sliding water, with the squat, broad-bowed flats pushing by. Outside, above John Smith's head, rose the mighty walls of the Shiloh Mills, their windows whitened with haloes of driven flour-dust, and their masonry clamped and stayed with titanic supports of iron. On the other bank of the canal an immense foundry shot up its gaunt sides of skeleton iron dotted with shivered panes of glass, behind which the clang of ceaseless hammers rose and fell upon the aching air. At his back,

as he stooped patiently over the cumbrous ledgers, was the dusky counting-house of the Shiloh Mills, where more than twenty clerks, cramped into a space too small for a dozen, and given but light enough for half their number, elbowed one another at the scratched and battered desks. Beyond were the scantily-lighted offices of the managing partners of the firm. Outside John Smith's window, trade triumphant; inside, trade triumphant. For ten years had John Smith surveyed the prospect, and all that time the one solitary spark of interest which the rolling seasons had brought him was the annual bursting into green of a frail and blighted creeper which grew up the side of his window, its roots set deeply in the soil of the canal bank. Day by day of this present spring had John Smith watched for signs of continued vitality in this sickly growth, but none had manifested themselves. At last, on his way down to the mills, John Smith saw a poplar in full bud, and upon investigating the condition of the creeper at his window found that it was

still grey and sapless. He heaved a sigh, and being a North-countryman and superstitious, murmured to himself that it boded no luck—it boded no luck.

* * * * * *

The Shiloh Mills was a flourishing concern, but no rill of its affluence ever trickled into the lives of its clerks or millers. Gloomy, cramped, and insanitary, the huge buildings were the despair of the factory inspector, and their prosperity spelled death to many a white-faced servant of the whirling stones. A handful of men owned them—all sharp, grasping, close-fisted men—who were keen to grind down expenses, even in the face of the flood-tide of good luck and high profits. Two of the quintette managed the business; the others were merchants in divers walks of commerce. But every Monday afternoon they met—the close, reserved, hard men—in the little dark private parlour, and discussed the last week's working and the outlook for the future. The Shiloh Mills had no

cashier or chief clerk—the two acting partners performing the duties generally discharged by such officials—so that outside the little dark parlour no single soul possessed sufficient acquaintance with their different departments to estimate where the mills stood financially. It was vaguely known that wealth was rolling in upon the proprietors, but their purchases of corn and sales of flour, though necessarily colossal, were so cleverly dispersed over a large area, and made through so many different agencies, that no one knew whether they ran into millions or merely thousands of pounds. Not even the banking brotherhood—that knower of all business secrets—knew in this case. They knew that Connors', that the National, that the General Amalgamated, even that the Bank of England itself had large dealings with the Shiloh firm, and it was said that the strong-room at the mills held a much larger sum in gold and notes than was usually kept on the premises of any such undertaking. But none could tell another of the exact amounts, no one hand

held all the strings of knowledge, and so the whole of the affairs of the Shiloh Mills were shrouded in darkness and in a vague mystery.

The Shiloh Mills were not loved by their rivals in the trade. There was scarcely a baker over two broad industrial counties that did not use their flour for his bread; scarcely a grocer on whose counter there did not lie those linen bags, faintly tinted blue, and blazoned in staring capitals, "The Shiloh Mills;" and not a firm, however enterprising, could disturb their custom or work its way into a single one of their accounts. It seemed absolutely inexplicable to millers, who knew that the Shiloh Mills flour was often of poor quality, and that the great purchases of their buyer often included damaged grain. But still the current of the Shiloh Mills' success flowed more and more rapidly, the giant stones whirled ceaselessly by night and day, and the lights of their hundred windows gleamed over the inky waters of the canal.

* * * * * *

One man there was who, if he had had sufficient interest in life, might have known much that went on in the dark private parlour of the Shiloh Mills. That was John Smith. He had been longest in the service of the firm, and had always proved himself a reliable arithmetician, though devoid of the wider knowledge of cross and double entry which would have promoted him to a better position and salary. It was this latter quality of mathematical ignorance, combined with his indifference to things in general, and his exceeding accuracy in matters of routine arithmetic, which had placed him in a position to possess—if he had cared to use his brains sufficiently to cognise the facts he held—exact and peculiar information regarding the Shiloh Mills. For the keen, close, shrewd men who ruled the enormous concern from that little dark parlour were growing just the least bit tired of that arithmetical toil, by the doing of which themselves they had kept even their own office staff in such profound ignorance of the generalizations of

their business. And they had departed a trifle from the strict letter of the principle of silence which they had maintained for so many years, and from time to time, with many injunctions as to inviolable secrecy, had handed over to their faithful and automatic servant, John Smith, sundry figured sheets of foolscap to add, subtract, and generally deal with. These would have placed John Smith in a position of absolute knowledge if his brain had only possessed sufficient vitality to become inquisitive. But for the present it had not, and he held the key of knowledge in his hand without caring enough about it to know that it was a key at all.

What those sheets of thickly-figured foolscap would have told him was this: that six thousand five hundred shops—small and large—for the sale of bread and flour, were the absolute property of those close, shrewd men who owned the Shiloh Mills. The bread supply of two counties was in their hands; they were without a serious rival in the field. By slow degrees these shops had been bought,

to be held by the five under an arrangement entirely separate from the Shiloh partnership; managers had been placed in them, and their businesses were proceeding under the superintendence of the three partners who were only sleeping members of the Shiloh concern. This was the secret of the Shiloh Mills' success: they represented the demand as well as the supply. Why they chose to keep all this a matter of mystery they best knew—the close-fisted, shrewd, silent men. As for John Smith, he worked on these special accounts after all his colleagues had gone—worked as steadily, as industriously, as he did in the daytime. Beneath his window outside the black canal water slipped by silently, and in the winter nights the white glare shot up from the foundry chimneys; the crimson shone through its skeleton windows, and flashed and flickered on the broken glass. And close to John Smith's ear his pen-point sounded busily upon the foolscap, while above its chirping sound the incessant hammers beat

out their reiterated phrase of clangorous percussion.

John Smith had had a good deal of night work lately. The five were planning something—something more than ordinarily gigantic, something more crafty, more lucrative, more shrewd than ever. And John Smith, patient, ignorant, reliable, was working out their designs on paper. He did not know what it was all about, save that it had to do with an infinite array of figures, with intricate cross-balances, with involved hypothetical calculation. If he had been able to see he would have known that the five were planning to turn starvation and suffering into profit and dividend. Controlling as they did the bread supply of two industrial counties, they proposed to raise on a given day the price of bread over the whole of that area. The wheat market was showing indications of a rise, in response to a rather scanty supply—nothing unusual, all circumstances considered—normally to be at once checked by the arrival of several large cargoes, such as were

ordinarily due. But by a *fin de siècle* refinement of commercial tactics, the five, with their insatiable buying power, had forestalled the purchasers who trusted to the open markets of the world, by buying from great American and Continental growers almost the whole of the cargoes timed to arrive shortly—cargoes universally depended upon to check the strengthening rates. The stock of grain-stuffs in the country was exceptionally low, and much of that was lying to the order of the Shiloh Mills. This was the situation so cleverly brought about by the five men who ruled the Shiloh Mills:—rates were rising, the market was bare, stocks were small, the heavy cargoes nearing delivery were all the property of the five, and, by a mixture of manipulation or bribery, none were due for a week or ten days after. The plan of the quintette was to raise the price of bread in the multitude of shops really, though not ostensibly, under its control, a farthing on Monday, a halfpenny on Wednesday, three-farthings on Friday, and a penny on Saturday. On

the following Monday, if affairs were satisfactory, it was to rise a penny-farthing. On the Tuesday it was to drop a farthing below its normal level, in order to bring back any angry customers. By this solitary week's work the five expected to net the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, being thirty thousand pounds apiece.

And at the documents which were fast reducing all this to the level of an indubitable certainty, John Smith toiled diligently, with the canal and the foundry hammers for sole companions. It was after a long night's work of this kind that John Smith, rising and coming down to the Shiloh Mills rather late, noticed the poplar in full bud, and looked for his own pet vine to have shot forth green tendrils. But it was sapless and dead, and John Smith muttered that it boded no luck—it boded no luck.

* * * * * *

At half-past twelve o'clock on this particular day John Smith went for a walk. It

was the latter moiety of his dinner hour, and the sky was cloudless. He lounged up the canal bank, enjoying the early spring sunshine. Half a mile above the Mills, a laden barge was sliding down the black waterway toward the town. John Smith met it and turned back with it. By the side of the horse that pulled it a man strolled with long, jerky, wobbling strides. In one hand he held a loaf of bread, in the other a jack-knife, with which he was slashing thick slices off the brown lump, devouring them greedily. John Smith closed up to him and sauntered along at his elbow. At last he ventured on a remark.

"Bread's good when you're hungry," he observed.

"Ay," assented the other, "damned good!"

John Smith was surprised at the vehemence of the agreement, and relapsed into silence. They walked on together for some moments, and then the owner of the jack-knife supplemented his observation.

"Sometimes," he added gruffly, "yer can't get it, let alone butter."

"Ay," returned John Smith, falling into his manner as he had fallen into his stride.

"Ever been hungry, mate?" asked the flatman, swallowing an appalling mouthful of his luncheon; "that is, ever mad hungry, and neither coin nor crumb to yer hand?"

"Never," replied John Smith.

"I 'ave," said the flatman. "'Twas one winter when the canal froze, and we were hard up. Not a bite or sup for two days Then I begged a copper and bought bread. Damn it!—it were good."

"Ay," murmured John Smith, and they went on mutely, the tackle of the horse jingling occasionally, and the swing-tree thudding against its hindquarters as it faltered occasionally in its stride.

The man looked up with an assertive little light in his eyes.

"There be those," he said, "that would take the very bread out of the mouths of the poor to buy them satins and silks. Such is the man that owns that boat."

He pointed to the flat. On her bows

was painted, "The Maria, 856. Ephraim Knowles."

John Smith turned away his eyes. It was the name of one of the sleeping partners in the Shiloh Mills.

"You know him?" inquired the flatman.

"Ay," said John Smith.

"Then you know naught good of him," was the grim retort.

"Naught," admitted John Smith.

The flatman lashed out with his whip in the air.

"Damn him!" he said.

The boat had drawn abreast of the Shiloh Mills, and the bell was ringing for the termination of the dinner-hour.

"Ay," repeated the flatman, "the very bread out of the mouths of the poor!"

"Good-day," said John Smith.

"Good-day," answered the flatman, and then lashing out again with his whip at the name on his boat's bows, "Damn him!"

* * * * * *

John Smith was working late on his special accounts. It was growing towards the end of the week, being Thursday in fact, and by Saturday night, or Monday morning at latest, the news must flash out—by telegraph if need be—over two counties that bread was advanced a farthing. So John Smith's unwitting brain and hand worked hard over the final sheets of calculations. And, suddennly, as a man awakes from sleep into the real world—John Smith knew—he knew what he had been doing, knew what the next week would see in a hundred towns; put this and that together in throb after throb of thought, and then, the entire scheme plain to eyes and brain, laid down his pen and wept. The flatman's voice sounded in his ears. He could hear the *pad* of his feet, the clank of the horse's gear, and the hissing sound of the boat as it drew through the water.

"There be those," was echoed in his ears, "that would take the very bread out of the mouths of the poor."

John Smith sat with his head in his hands, thinking deeply. He had awakened to the marvellous completeness of the commercial *cul-de-sac* which those five brains had constructed. In almost every one of the hundred odd towns about which the Shiloh Mills had stretched their invisible arms, trade was at its lowest ebb, and thousands of people were living on the very verge of starvation. This hundred and fifty thousand pounds which the five proprietors of the Shiloh Mills expected to reap from their *coup* would spell stark hunger over many a square mile of English ground. What could a simple clerk do to checkmate so wily a plan? His mind laboured heavily with the difficulty. At last he saw that the keystone of the whole edifice was the owning by the Shiloh Mills of the half-dozen large cargoes due to arrive in the course of the next week. If only those belonged to other firms—firms that would put them on the open market—the pressure which the five were proposing to bring to bear upon it would be relieved, the "corner" broken,

and any attempt to put up the price of bread would be scotched by the competition which would then be possible. The contracts for those cargoes were in the safe, and the keys of the safe were in John Smith's pocket—given him by the managing partner that he might put back the documents at which he was working. Slowly and deliberately John Smith got up, crossed to the massive iron coffer, took out the contracts, and burned them to ashes in the fading office fire. Then he wrote half-a-dozen cablegrams, put his papers in the safe, leaving the keys in the lock, and went home.

In the morning there was no John Smith at the Shiloh Mills, but half-a-dozen messages were flashing over electric wires cancelling—under the recognised provisions of the trade—the contracts given by the Shiloh Mills for the cargoes of the *Almira*, the *Mary Jameson*, the *Hector*, the *Juanita*, the *Rose*, and the *Ellen Porter*. And by noon half-a-dozen corn brokers received orders *per* cable to sell in the open market the

cargoes of the said vessels, then *en route* for Liverpool.

* * * * * *

In the morning of the next day (Saturday) the managing partners of the Shiloh Mills were startled by a series of cablegrams acknowledging receipt of their instructions cancelling contracts, etc., and in the sale-catalogues for the ensuing week stood the cargoes of the ships *Almira*, *Mary Jameson*, *Hector*, *Juanita*, *Rose*, and *Ellen Porter*. And when the astonished merchants sent in a rage for the contracts, they were missing, and the couple knew that their plot had failed, and that a hundred and fifty thousand pounds had slipped through their fingers.

* * * * * *

The Shiloh Mills still flourish, and in the office of a certain firm of London merchants there is an old white-haired clerk who is called John Smith. He is very faithful and accurate, but not bright. He was taken on

without a reference of any sort because the head of the firm liked his looks, and he has always been a good servant. The clerks in the office are very fond of him. "He might have done better if he'd had a chance," they say, "been a chief clerk, or cashier, or something. But then he takes no real interest in his business, and a man must do that to get on."

* * * * * *

The vine by John Smith's window at the Shiloh Mills never budded again. He has forgotten it, for he grows a geranium on his window-sill—a window-sill that looks out upon the Thames, and if ever he takes a day off, for he is old and getting past work, one of the young clerks waters it, for love of John Smith.

THE SHOWMAN OF GOBLINTOWN

"AND HE SAID: 'WHO TOLD THEE THAT THOU WAST NAKED?'"

The Eden-story.

THE SHOWMAN OF GOBLINTOWN.

GOBLINTOWN lies in the heart of the forest, a full mile distant from any of the haunts of men. It nestles at the foot of a great bank, where, in May, the violets and wild hyacinths crowd their purple heads until the very grasses cry for elbow-room. An errant company of saplings lounge at ease in straggling groups, fans of sepia-brown tracery in winter, unsteady plumes of foliage in spring. A huge willow grows half-way down the bank, its mass of grey-black roots projecting from the rich earth in a dark, weirdly-shapeless tangle. Beneath their moist shadow grow delicate ferns and quaint lichens, some fronded like elfin lace, some swollen and blunt like miniature cactii. Nestled down cosily between the mighty tendrils that day

by day suck up the willow's life-blood from the soil, lies Goblintown—a city of strange inhabitants. The Goblins are akin to the gnomes on their fathers' side; but on their mothers' they are own cousins to the Moon-people. Unearthly little folk they are, with their wide eyes of lustrous, opal-tinted satin, their small soft hands and downy palms. Their garments are of moths' wings, overlaid like the scales of the snake; their shoes of leather from the bat's broad pinions; their filmy cloaks spun from the faint gossamer of the hedge-spider. They make their houses in the crevices of the willow-roots, lining them with lambswool and swans-down, and with the velvety petals of the foxglove. The life of the Goblins is the sweetest on earth, since they alone are perfect lovers. When one of the tiny people is a year and a day old, its wonderful eyes open (for the Goblins are born blind), and straightway it loves and is loved. A hundred years the two live and love, and then together they fade and disappear. Where they have been

lies a drop of bright dew. This the gnomes gather up and bury it deep, deep in the earth, for a hundred years more. As the years pass the drop grows hard and clear as crystal, and glorious with a thousand broken lights and shattered rainbow tints. And at the last, men dig for the opals, and prize them greatly. But always there is a fear that they are unlucky, and perhaps the fear is just, since to tear an opal from its bed is to violate a grave. Also the love of the Goblins is chaste and pure, whilst that of human lovers—who most of all fear to give the opal as a gift—is fierce and passionate . . . . Such is the life and death of the people of Goblintown.

* * * * * *

Into the market-place of Goblintown, one still summer afternoon, there came a showman. He rode upon a tumbril made from a curved scrap of oak-bark mounted upon acorn wheels, and drawn by two stout gray rats. The tumbril was loaded with wooden bars and rolls of canvas, from the top of which the

Showman guided his team, aided by a tapering stalk of wire-grass. Following this rude waggon came a closed car woven of rushes on an osier framework—to the shaft of which were yoked four field-mice—and carefully guarded by two stag-beetles. A drunken-looking tree-frog sat on the box and drove.

In the centre of the market-place the Showman halted his caravan and dismounted. He was a gnome, hunchbacked and burly, with a pointed white beard, and profuse ringlets of silver-grey hair falling from under his red cap upon his misshapen shoulders. His doublet was brown—the shifting, changeful brown of the autumn leaves—his threadbare hose of a faded sap-green. Over his close-fitting dress he wore a short cloak of russet shot with ghostly silver lightnings, and lined with shimmering flame-coloured silk. The long thin toes of his bat's-wing-leather shoes were looped up to his ankles with chains of little silver bells that tinkled as he walked. He wore an old rusty sword, and his ears were pointed like a ferret's. Above the root

of his aquiline nose, and apparently fastened against the skin by some kind of glue, was the iridescent tip of a peacock's feather. Whenever the Showman knitted his brows or wrinkled his forehead—and he did one or the other twice in a minute—the steel-blue halo flickered like a blown rushlight.

Under the Showman's direction, half-a-dozen dormice, which had ridden on the top of the frail car, or had swung on its ample tail-board, built up the canvas and poles into a large tent, in shape like a horse-shoe. The Goblins formed an excited crowd about the workers, and watched the progress of their task. Not till the fluttering canvas skin was stretched tightly over the complex mesh of struts and stays, and the car and waggon drawn up behind, did the Showman condescend to notice the presence of strangers. Then he mounted upon the tumbril, spat, and spoke. The Goblins listened with all their ears. Such wonders as were to be seen in that tent! All that was to be known of Love and Death, Hate and Fear, of the lives of

men and women, goblins and gnomes, could be learnt therein after moonrise. The Showman shifted his position occasionally as he talked, the bells on his shoe-chains chiming melodiously. And the price of admission? A single opal! A shudder ran through the Goblin folk. To rifle the graves of their dead! Besides, only the gnomes knew where they were; far down in the bowels of the earth, safe from all but those who had hidden them away in darkness and silence. Still the Showman spoke on, and still the Goblins listened hungrily. Soon they forgot to shudder, and only thought of the impossibility of finding the opals. The darkness deepened about them, and the glow-worms lit their lanterns in the streets of Goblintown, while the Showman spoke on, the silver bells rang irregularly, and the peacock-feather on the brown forehead under the red cap shone like fire. At last the Showman ceased, and the Goblins stole away, fearing one another for the first time in their happy lives.

* * * * * *

Slowly the Moon rose over the forest, kissing the tree-tops with her pallid light. The River whispered sharply to the tall flags as it swung round the bend and lingered by the bank. A long black finger of a tree-root, that had thrust itself out from the shelving soil to sip the brown water, made a little eddy of its own among the wind-ruffles, and gossiped to the loitering stream. . .

"I belong to the willow behind the bank there," said the Root. "Such a tangle of us there is, and yet we all know one another, and all know what is going on wherever one of us has poked a finger-tip. Such doings up at headquarters in Goblintown, and such doings away down among the deepest of us where the opals lie! You must know, old River, that the gnomes could not find their way about in the earth if it were not for the paths which the tree-roots make. They build their tunnels along our main arteries, and where the tunnels end they squeeze themselves on hands and knees between us and the loose earth that we break up with our

tendrils. Away down, where the greatest of us anchor the willow to the earth, where the strain comes when the winds blow and the forest shrieks under the hammer-strokes of the gale—away down upon the skirt of the red soil, where we have crept into the clefts of the rock for a better hold—there the gnomes have buried the opals. And there, until now, no Goblin has ever set foot, for the Earth-laws forbid it. But to-night, after the Showman had put up his tent and made his speech, the Goblins, one by one, crept away and sought eagerly for the secret road that leads to our heart, where the opals lie. And when they could not find it, they swore to us by the Love of the Goblins that they would bring down on us the Worm and the Fly, the Blight of the Bark, the Blight of the Leaf, and the Blight of the Sap, if we did not show them the path. And we took counsel of the trunk, and showed it to them. After all, the Goblins are our tenants, and the gnomes are no more. Let them fight it out between them. Did we not well, old River?"

But the River only whispered to the reeds.

"What says the River, oh, Reeds of the Water's-edge?" asked the Willow-root—"for we understand not the tongue in which he speaks to you."

"*Swish-sh-sh-sh,*" murmured the Reeds, as they swung in the breeze. "No good ever came of trust-breaking—no good—no good. So says the River, *swish-sh-sh.*"

"*Pshaw!*" retorted the Willow-root, "they are both tenants, one with the other. The River is a fool."

"*Swish-sh-sh,*" answered the Reeds of the Water's-edge.

* * * * * *

The Showman stood at the door of his wonderful tent. In his hand he held a long silver whistle crusted thick with opals in a filagree setting. The moonbeams danced on it like the ghosts of dead flames.

"*Swee-e-e-e-eet!*" trilled the whistle suddenly from the Showman's lips. "*Swee-eet, swee-ee-ee-ee-eet!*"

The Showman, with the whistle still thrust into his grey beard, paused and listened. Far away in the forest there was a soft murmur like a sigh. Nearer and nearer it came, and before it the trees and the flowers stirred like ruffled wavelets, till the woods were as clamorous as on an October night when the equinoctials are blowing, and the creatures in the forest awoke and nestled one against another in wonderment. When the tumult of leaves and boughs was at its height, the Showman blew his whistle sharply.

"*Sweet!*"

The mimic babel ended, and the Showman listened once more. Deep in the earth the willow-roots, from whose secret crannies the opals had been stolen, shivered with a sense of loss as the Goblins poured out from the narrow cleft which led down to the violated burial-place of their race. The Showman heard the patter of tiny feet, and smiled behind his grey moustaches. Then there was silence, for the Goblins felt the smile. They paused in the shadows of the root-cliffs above

Goblintown. The Showman smiled again, and called behind him into the tent.

"Right inside there," his gruff voice said, and he restored the thin tube to his lips—his short, thick fingers in a difficult row upon the holes.

"*Swee-swee-swee-ee-eet!*" began the whistle in a gay ripple, and fell off into a low, throbbing melody. Then a voice lifted itself up inside the tent and sang:—

"Ye linger at Love's portals,
And know not of desire,
Far poorer ye than mortals,
Are chill, nor dream of fire.

"Ye feign with chaste embraces
A warmth ye cannot feel;
No red blood in your faces
Hath set Love's sign and seal.

"Ye sip a tasteless potion
That Wisdom would have quaffed,
When Passion's rapt emotion
With white foam heaped the draught.

"Farewell! through dreary ages
Be faithful, calm, and cold,
While Earth's unconscious sages
Love's own sweet self enfold.
Then pay with Life his wages,
And laugh as they grow old."

The singer ceased.

"*Swee-eet*," cried the silver whistle. There was a rush of pattering shoes as the Goblins poured down to the tent in an impatient mob.

"Gently! gently!" said the Showman. "Admission, one opal. Love and Life, Art and Fame, Luxury and Power to be seen within. The only show of the kind on the road. Admission, one opal. *If* you please. An extra big one? No change given—front seats with cushions for the larger sizes. Pass on, pass on, *if* you please. Love and Life, Art and Fame, to be seen within."

Inside the tent, as by a miracle, there had been raised a dainty theatre. Above the luxurious stalls and orderly pit was a cosy dress-circle, and above that the lofty gallery. Every corner of the cunningly-utilised space was soon occupied by the half-fearful crowd of Goblins, and the air became sibilant with the hushed whispers of the timorous and excited audience. The magnetic thrill which lies asleep in a theatre during the daytime, but wakens up at night, began to lay hold

upon them, and when, at a signal, the fireflies hung in a brilliant double row around the high ceiling, crawled into the open scroll-work of the cornice and left the place in darkness, a shudder of alarm ran through the Goblins. The glow-worms at the footlights rolled over on to their backs the better to light up the stage, the will-o'-the-wisp lime-lights at the "wings" swung round to the centre, the silver whistle blew, and the curtain rose on an empty stage.

A murmur of disappointment stirred in the theatre, and the Showman came on at the back. As he strode down to the front, the peacock's feather on his forehead shone like a splash of powdered jewels.

"*Sweet*," said the whistle, and the Showman added to the gallery, "Sit down." The gallery promptly obeyed.

"I'll explain, if you let me," observed the Showman, curtly, "how this thing works," and he blew his whistle again.

"Bring on the Soul of the Poet," he commanded, as a dormouse answered the call at

the wings. The Goblins waited expectantly. Presently there was a musical jingle, and a couple of dormice walked gravely on to the stage, holding each an end of two slender gold chains. They crossed the bare boards with measured tread, and the further extremities of the chains were seen to be fastened to a belt of gold, studded with diamonds, that encircled the waist of a creature scarcely bigger than a Goblin, and infinitely more delicate. It had two pairs of fragile wings, snow-white as swansdown, which sparkled as ice sparkles under the moon. Proportionately to its stature, it was as slight as the starr-grass of the sand-dunes. Its face shone like a spirit's, and its motion was gracious and stately.

"This," remarked the Showman, "is our Poet's Soul—the only one of the kind in existence. There is no deception. Any Goblin may step on to the stage and examine for himself. The Poet's Soul has been exhibited before all the crowned heads of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Ameri——"

The Soul of the Poet laughed. It was an airy little laugh, and it warmed the hearts of the Goblins.

"Inflate the Colossal Bubble," directed the Showman, with a twinkle in his eye and a brusque note of the whistle. Two dormice "supers" brought on a great clay pipe and a huge bowl. The Goblins laughed this time, and the guardians of the Poet's Soul marched solemnly to the front, saluted, and fastened the ends of the chains to ring-bolts on the stage.

"The assistants will now proceed to inflate one of my Colossal Bubbles," went on the Showman, "the only things of their kind in existence. After which, the Soul of the Poet will gaze upon it and sing. By a peculiar process—which has been explained, under pledge of secrecy, to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and pronounced by him to be absolutely harmless and scriptural—the Poet's visions will then appear in the Colossal Bubble. Fresh soap is used for each of these huge spheroids, which are inflated by a patent pneumatic pump, the only one of its kind in existence."

The Soul of the Poet laughed again, drowning the concluding words of the Showman's pet phrase, and the Goblins bent forward eagerly.

The whistle blew, and a faint haze arose. A heated atmosphere — an atmosphere piquing, alkaline, laden with moisture and the perfume of heliotrope—filled the theatre. Gradually the haze cleared away, and the Bubble, growing rapidly larger, swayed to and fro uneasily, like a balloon tugging at its tether. As it began to fill the entire space of the stage, the Showman, with a bow, stepped off at the side, while the Soul of the Poet fidgeted and shook its shining wings.

"*Swee-eet*," said the Showman's whistle; the "limelights" turned themselves upon the swaying globe, the Soul of the Poet ascended gently to the limit of its chains, and the Goblins breathed anxiously.

First the Bubble flushed with the crimson of dawn, then with the yellow glory of the sun, then with the pale beauty of the stars,

then with the tender azure of the moon-rays. Then it regained its pristine crystal, and the Soul of the Poet sang, as though half to itself:—

"Warm as the Sun, and as gracious,
True as the Stars on high,
Sweet as the red, red rose of the Dawn
Against the cold grey sky,
Things above
Are like Love.

"False as the ray of the trait'ress Moon,
Stealing from cloud to cloud,
The passionate lover whose prize is won,
For he breaks the vow he vowed.
Things above
Are like Love."

But the Goblins only heard the first verse, for the Soul of the Poet sang the last one very softly, amid the clapping of downy palms and the stamping of small feet.

Suddenly the shifting lights in the Bubble dissolved and opened out. The Goblins saw the picture of an ancient Italian street, with heavily-embayed doorways and projecting casements. Underneath, in letters of silver,

shimmered the legend "Verona; a Public Place." The play was "Romeo and Juliet," and the Soul of the Poet but a sorry plagiarist. . . .

Mortals know the story—how Romeo loved Juliet, the fair and passionate Juliet; how she was to have wed another; how they married in secret; and how a notable tragedy of passion and death befell. But it was new to the Goblins, and they followed its progress in that magic sphere with awed attention. As they watched, the breath of human desire passed like a wind across the still waters of their souls, and vague tremors stirred them to unrest and to a voiceless craving they knew not for what.

* * * * * *

"*Swee-eet!*"

The curtain rolled slowly down at the sound of the whistle, blotting out with a hoarse rustle the Colossal Bubble and its final scene in the tomb of the Capulets. The leaden sorrow which had clutched the Goblins held

them in their places for a moment after the lights went up. There was no clapping or stamping. They had tasted Passion, and had found Death at its core; they had drunk its foaming cup, and had found bitterness in the dregs: they had spelled out "Love" in mortal speech, and its echo had come back:—"Tragedy." They sat silent and impassive as the Soul of the Poet stepped to the footlights and bowed gracefully; then rose and mutely departed.

In the morning the Showman, his tent, his tumbril, and his caravan had vanished, and with them ten generations of Goblin dead.

* * * * * *

Spring had come again, and upon the Willow-root which over-hung the whispering River a fragile green shoot was trembling in the breeze beneath its feathery crown of unfolding leaflets. The April rains had raised the River to its old level, and once more it murmured about the black finger-tip thrust from the bank.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked the River, touching the youngling with a lapping wave. "Gone into business on your own account?"

The Root quivered with pride under its first-born. Then it stopped abruptly.

"What was that for?" inquired the River.

"Memories," said the Root, "and the thought of how I came to be in business for myself at all."

"How did you?" demanded the River. And the Willow-root, dandling the baby tree upon its black finger with stiff creaks of lullaby, took up its tale, and told him what the Goblins saw in the Showman's tent.

"But how has that sent you into business on your own account?" interrupted the River.

"Patience," returned the Willow-root. "That night one of the Goblins was awakened by an evil dream—a dream of treachery and secret sin. And putting out his hand to touch his love for comfort, she was not there.

And something seemed to be singing in his ear:—

> 'False as the ray of the trait'ress Moon,
> Stealing from cloud to cloud.'

"He sprang up and crept out into Goblintown, all quiet with the tender peace of a summer dawn. Some instinct led him to a certain crevice in the Willow's tangled roots, where his love lay in the arms of his dearest friend. And the Goblin heard the sound of kisses. Then they saw him and fled away in fear. Into the market-square of Goblintown they came, and betrayer and betrayed closed in a deadly grip. At last the Goblin dame for whom they fought, saw that he whose guilt she shared was failing, and she snatched her bodkin from her bosom, and stabbed his adversary to the heart. He fell gasping and clutching his throat. The next moment there was but a shallow heap of dust where he had lain. The guilty couple shrieked with fear at this new terror, and all Goblintown poured out into its narrow streets, crowding

and chattering like rooks at nightfall. In the midst of their frightened babble the funeral conches of the gnomes were heard—for the gnomes, being the Goblins' sextons, know instantly when one dies. The Goblins fell back, and the King of the Gnomes himself appeared. Behind him came four of his people carrying a little coffin. The Goblins shuddered as the heap of brown dust and bones was gathered into it. Not a word was spoken until the coffin was raised to the sturdy shoulders of its bearers, and then one Goblin, bolder than the rest, fell on his knees and whispered :

"'What is this, our Lord the King?'

"A great tear rolled down the Gnome's cheek into his beard ; then he said sadly, his voice sounding far-away, and as though it came from within some funeral-vault :—

"'It is Death. Ye have tasted Passion, and are mortal, even as men and women.'

"'*Aai, aai!*' wailed the Goblins as they clung to each other.

"The laden gnomes passed out from the

crowd of weeping Goblins—weeping for the first time—and up to the heights above Goblintown. There they paused, and the Gnome King turned about.

"'Farewell, my brothers,' he called brokenly, 'farewell. Henceforth ye will fear and hate us. We are no longer the ministers of a beautiful immortality, we are but diggers of graves. Farewell.'

"He drew himself up, and his words quivered through the Willow like thunder-peals.

"'Cursed be the trust-breaker,' he said—'cursed with the Worm and the Fly, cursed with the Blight of the Bark, the Blight of the Leaf, the Blight of the Sap. False Willow, the Doom of the Barren Fig-tree be yours.'

"Then he was gone, with his people and the coffin of the dead Goblin. Before the summer was over the Willow was withered and sapless as a broken branch. But I am left, and I shall grow a tree of my own, unless the frosts come again this year."

THE SWAN-SONG OF MARTIN ANDERSON

"GOD . . . HATH MADE EVERYTHING BEAUTIFUL IN ITS TIME: ALSO HE HATH SET ETERNITY IN THEIR HEART."

Ecclesiastes (The Original).

THE SWAN-SONG OF MARTIN ANDERSON.

To Hester Noble, lady journalist, the gods had been good. She had dared to take her vacation in June, and the weather had been perfect. Her holiday had been a dream of quiet happiness, and now that it had come to an end, she lingered over its last hours regretfully. She had risen early on the morning of her final day, and, in her stout serge dress and strong boots, had started out to take a long farewell of her haunts. In the late afternoon she came to a wild fastness of the Devon coast-line dearer to her than any other of its pleasant spots. It was a narrow cove frequented by sea-birds, and made eerie with their plaintive cries and the sorrowful plash of the swinging tides against its huge reefs and boulders. Its sloping shore

was of the yellowest sand, and marched with a strip of grey shingle, backed by cliffs honeycombed with echoing caves. Many hours of restful, sunny peace had Hester Noble spent in this tiny bay, and as she sat down on a great rock and looked out upon the gently-pulsing waters, her eyes moistened with acute emotion at the thought of her departure.

The tide was coming in slowly, sending an advance-guard of transparent ripples creeping over the sand. They ran up to Hester's feet; she stooped and dipped her hands into them lovingly. Suddenly the whim came upon her to throw off her shoes and stockings and to walk homeward barefoot along the margin of the sea. Hester Noble was nothing if not decisive, and in a few minutes the limpid wavelets were whispering about her feet Hester was very straight and tall, and as she walked elastically through the ruffled expanse of crystal against the warm tints of the sunset, she would have made a very pretty picture if there had been anyone to paint it.

Soon the water deepened and Hester came out, white-footed, upon the sand to take a cut athwart the beach to a point where the water shallowed again. Fate would have it that she should cross the shingle, and many a grimace did the sharp stones provoke. Gazing over the vaguely-heaving swells in pathetic contemplation of the reddening west, Hester did not look too carefully to her present course, and turning a bluff promontory in instinctive pursuit of an habitual path, looked down with a convulsive start to find her foot upon the body of a man.

Hester, being neither a child nor a coward, collected her senses, after a pause of momentory stupefaction, and knelt down to ascertain whether the man were dead or asleep. His clothes were dry, so that he was not some victim of old Ocean's, flung back in disdain upon his own element, yet, though neat, they were sufficiently worn and soiled to indicate to a woman's eye that their wearer was closely acquainted with poverty. He himself was young and slight, with pallid skin and

eyes encircled by the areolæ of weariness and pain. The hair on his temples was streaked with white, and his forehead was lined with anxious furrows. His arms were outstretched upon the shingle, as though some evil fate had crucified him there.

Hester felt for the beating of his heart, and with a throb of her own, found that he was alive. She ran down to the sea and dipped her handkerchief in the salt foam. At its cold touch he started and opened his eyes. They were dazed, and had a frightened, hare-like look in their brown depths.

"Do not speak for a moment," she advised soothingly. "You fainted, I think, but you will be better in a moment."

He lay passively looking at her as she pressed the wet handkerchief to his forehead.

At last he spoke.

"Why did you touch me?" he demanded.

"I——?" said Hester, alarmed at his tone.

"Yes; I was dying."

"Dying?"

"Yes; intentionally. Why should you interfere?"

He sat up with difficulty. Hester shrank from him, thinking him mad.

He looked at her with an expressionless calm.

"Have you taken poison?" Hester asked beneath her breath.

"I? No," he told her scornfully. "I am no suicide."

"Are you ill, then?"

Her answer was a terrible fit of coughing, which shook him from head to foot. When he could speak he caught at her wrist.

"See," he said, "I've no doubt you mean well, but listen. I've had a week here. It's the first time I ever saw the sea or the country. I've lived in a wretched, smoky, ill-smelling town all my life—I am only twenty-two—a town where they make chemicals—a town where the air is like the vapour of the Pit. I worked behind the counter for eight years—'haporth o' tea, haporth o' sugar, and penn'orth o' bacon.' Oh, yes; eight till ten, and eleven on Friday and Saturday. And I grew so ill that some kindly souls sent

me here for a week—a week! to pay for my eight years' slavery! To-morrow I go back—back to smoke, back to toil, back to hopelessness and misery, and grind, grind, grind from year's end to year's end. And when I came out here to say good-bye to the only glimpse of heaven I ever saw, my heart grew sick and my breathing slow, and I had no reason to fight for life; so I said to my soul: 'Go forth out of this wretched body, and let them bury it deep, deep, deep, and you, who are myself, shall stay here for ever beside the moaning, calling water.' Yet you have wakened me to go back to that life of hideous torture. I suppose you are a philanthropist—a Christian, or something of that sort."

Hester looked at him aghast. Despite the fluent passion of the sentences his low tones were icily cold. When he ceased she put her hand on his with an impulsive gesture.

"I—I understand," she returned. "*I* go back to-morrow."

His eyes softened.

"I'm sorry," he said.

There was a pause. Hester was awed by his strange and determined quiet.

"Did you ever try to put it into words?" he went on suddenly.

"What?"

He swept his hand from point to point of the bay.

"All of it," he explained. "The sound of the sea, the feel of loneliness in the air, the warmth of the sun, the span of the sky, the voices of the sea-birds and the winds?"

"Often," she replied. "I write for my living. But I have no genius, and so I never succeed in saying it, though I do my best. There is something about the loneliness of it in Shelley:—

> '. . . A rock of Ocean's own
> Topples o'er the abandoned sea
> As the tides change sullenly.'"

He repeated the concluding line of her quotation.

"'As the tides change sullenly.' What is that?"

"It is Shelley's."

"No, no, I mean what is it—that *swing-swing* of the words. What do you call it?"

"I don't know what you mean—quite," Hester said, bewildered a little. "All real poetry has it."

He caught at the phrase.

"'Poetry.' Ah, that is what you call it—is it?"

She looked at him amazed.

"Do you mean to say," she exclaimed, "that you never heard of poetry before?"

"Has it capital letters all down one side, and the lines of different lengths?"

He read assent in her face.

"Oh," he pursued, "I have seen that, but I never read it. 'As the tides change sullenly.'" The grave rhythm of the words had arrested his attention.

"Do you write poetry?" he broke out.

She shook her head.

"I am not clever enough," she confessed candidly.

"Do you think I could write it?" he

inquired eagerly. "It makes what you say sound so much more real. If I could only put some things into poetry that would swing and speak like that I—I——"

Her woman's wit prompted her—

"You wouldn't die."

He looked around him, and then up into her face.

"Not till I had done it," he said.

She sighed, irritated at his persistency.

"Very well, then," she retorted. "I don't know whether you can write poetry, but you've been talking it. I think I wouldn't die if I were you; at least, not yet awhile. They used to say that a swan only sang once, and that was just before its death. But that song was the most beautiful of all songs. You'd better see if you can't do some singing before you die, instead of lying there wishing you were dead, like a . . . like—a—coward."

The word stung him to the quick. He got up slowly, drew a long breath, and walked a few steps away. Then he came back.

"Thank you," he said; "it hurt, but it did

me good. I will not die now till I have sung my swan-song. Good-bye."

He walked off slowly across the sands.

Hester put on her shoes and stockings. As she fastened the second lace a scalding tear-drop fell upon the brown hands.

When she looked up he had turned a corner and vanished.

* * * * * *

There was a great strike in the heart of a Northern shire, and the wheels of Commerce were standing still for want of coal. Famine stalked imminent through a hundred grimy towns and townships, Rapine muttered about pit-mouths and in cramped streets. Hester Noble had gone down by a fast train as special commissioner for a London daily, and at the height of the misery, in the midst of the terror, she went to and fro, quietly, coolly; taking a turn at a sick-bed, helping to distribute relief, writing, talking, observing, with all the pluck and *verve* of a born journalist, until she gained the confidence of the rough

collier women, and won the admiration of the miners themselves by her sympathy and advocacy of their cause.

For many weeks she travelled to and fro on foot or on horseback among the people of the Moorland County, and all the time the trouble grew worse and worse, distress spread, and the universal misery threatened to reach a breaking strain. Riots were feared, and company after company of soldiery came marching into village and township, reinforced by an occasional troop of cavalry. And the miners grew more sullen and stern with each hungry day that passed, while Hester Noble wept over her note-book at sufferings that seemed more than mortal.

At length the storm burst. A quarrel broke out at a solitary pit-head between strikers and "blacklegs," and the infection spread like wildfire. Hester Noble had ridden into a small town, the centre of a dozen mining undertakings, just in time to hear the news, and to observe its effect. Groups gathered and grew about the corners

of the streets, men spoke recklessly beneath their breath, and anxious women closed their shutters, praying silently that there might be no bloodshed. Insensibly the groups coalesced and became a mob. What foolish pate first conceived the notion none could tell, but soon the crowd was swearing with hoarse vows to attack and murder the "blacklegs" at a mine whose gaunt winding-gear sprang up almost in the centre of the town. Still, it contented itself with swearing, and swayed and swirled about the big lamp in the square.

"Would to God," said a woman with a sleeping baby in her arms, to Hester Noble, "that Martin were here."

"Who is Martin?" she asked.

"Who?" repeated the woman, the tears sounding in her voice. "Why, Martin Anderson! Lord, it's nobbut Martin that's been keeping them this quiet for weeks, and by nowt but his tongue at that."

"You had better go inside," recommended Hester absently, "they are coming at last,"

and at her words the mob turned and came—slinking along at first, then in a species of charge, with fierce shouts of self-encouragement.

She sprang out and ran before them, guessing their destination.

As the rioters neared their goal they came into the narrowest part of the main road, a cramped, old-fashioned street, and slackened speed in its ascending gut. Suddenly at the top of the slight rise appeared a line of soldiers. The mob came on savagely at the sight of the red-coats, then fell back slightly, while a trembling civilian read the Riot Act.

Caught between the two parties Hester crouched in a deep doorway and watched. As the tremulous recitative of the magistrate died away, Hester, being nearer to the soldiers than to the body of the crowd, heard an order—the parenthesis given in a low tone:

"Load—with blank cartridge—load. Fire a volley. Ready! Present!"

When the dropping rattle of accoutrements fell upon the ears of the mob their blood got up, and the leaders made an ugly rush

"*Fire!*" and a volley rang out.

The crowd did not turn tail, probably having anticipated a warning.

"Load—with ball cartridge—load. Fire a volley. Ready! Present!"

A man burst through the crowd headlong into the space of neutral ground that separated the contestants, and paused, gasping, with one hand held up. His beard of a fortnight's growth was streaked with blood from his mouth, his eyes shone with a wild fire even in the half-light of the street lamps, and his whole appearance was that of a man who had been running at the top of his speed for miles. The commanding officer paused with the final word on his lips, as the new-comer struggled to speak. Once, twice, he tried, and the red fluid bubbled to his lips and trickled down upon his breast. At last he gained articulate utterance.

"Men! men!" he said brokenly; "another

moment and a score of you would have been lying in your blood beneath the feet of your fellows, while these heartless guns poured out their leaden hail upon your writhing bodies."

He steadied his shaking voice, and forced it to its utmost pitch as he went on: "True, you would not mind—brave hearts! you would give your lives for the cause—you are not afraid of death. But think how every newspaper in the land would tell in the morning of your mad folly, and the public mind be turned against us from North to South. Think of orphaned children, of widowed wives, of homes left desolate of their bread-winners. Think of your women weeping over those cursed bullet-wounds, think of honest folk grieving over your lack of self-control, think of rich men jeering at you and your leaders, and hold—for God's sake!—hold your hands. If you care more for venting your anger—yet God knows how just and righteous an anger!—than you do for the prosperity of the cause for which you have struggled these

long weeks, then be fools, be madmen, and charge to your ruin. Ah, men, be wise! Leave your wrongs to the arbitration of cool heads and honest hearts. Go home to your wives and little ones, and thank God that you have made neither them nor another man's widow and orphans."

Hester felt the insanity of the mob ebb suddenly, as the waters of a reservoir ebb when the dam bursts.

He brushed a runnel of blood from his beard.

"You Englishmen, tricked out in red coats, behind your steel death-tubes there! Will you shoot down the brothers and fathers of your sweethearts for standing out for an honest man's rights? Will you go up to the Great White Throne with the blood of starving men on your hands? Will you slaughter and maim your countrymen? Is this night a fit one to be blazoned on your colours when you go out to war against England's enemies? Take away your men, for God's sake, sir officer, while I quieten

this howling mob of hungry husbands and sons."

A ghastly spurt of crimson choked his utterance, and he fell backwards.

Hester sprang out from the doorway, and across to the dark heap lying in the road.

"Attention! Company retire! About—turn! Quick—march!"

Martin Anderson had won.

"Don't move me," he said to Hester, as she tried to lift him. "I shall be dead in a few minutes. It's hæmorrhage."

She wiped his mouth with her handkerchief.

"The swan dies mute this time," he added, recognising her.

"No, no," she wept, "you have sung a better swan-song than Shelley or Keats."

"*I?*" he gasped, raising himself on an elbow. "*I*——? Was that poetry?"

"Yes, yes, a thousand times," she cried; "the greatest of all poetry."

He sighed like a little child and lay back. The swan had passed out of hearing.

THE LITTLE TEACHER

"WISDOM HATH BUILDED HER HOUSE."

The Scripture.

THE LITTLE TEACHER.

ONCE upon a time there was a certain grimy Board School in a grimy town upon a still grimier river. It was not a happy place to live in, this huge straggling fungus of brick and mortar, with the creeping slimy river sucking by its roots, and the big ugly Board School was not pleasant either to teach in or to learn in. Dark, narrow, ill-smelling streets wove a dreary web about it, while tall and dingy factories crowded maliciously around as if to shut out the sun. The scholars were frowsy, dirty girls and gross, impudent boys, and the teachers were sour and weary with fighting so vainly to let light into the darkened brains over which drink and ill-living, poverty and bad air, had drawn so thick a veil. For all day, above the clamour of shrill,

unchildish voices, the great iron pulses beat, on the right hand and on the left, and the thin walls quivered and shook with the whirring of swiftly-revolving wheels. And just as the clank and roar of the machinery dominated the education of these Board-school children, so it ground and roared along through all their lives, crushing them down, down, down into stupidity and despair. So the children had no relish for learning, because they had no hope; and the tired men and women set over them had none for teaching, because to their older ears the wheels seemed to sing an inarticulate pæan of mocking, diabolical triumph, day by day and year by year Wherefore the Board School in Mediterranean Street was the worst on the list of the Board; it earned poor grants, passed but a scanty percentage of its scholars, and lay perpetually under the displeasure of the inspector.

If there was one class worse than another in a place of such entirely bad reputation

it was Standard Four. There were fierce hulking fellows of thirteen in it—the hopeless dunces of the school, who would probably take two years to pass the simple Fourth Standard examination, and then would only scrape through by accident; there were stunted, weakly, under-fed boys who had not life enough in their rickety bodies to hold up their heads through more than half the day; there were sharp, sparely-built, evil-eyed lads, the cross-bred human terriers of the street—burglars and forgers, cracksmen and swell mobsmen in embryo. And by an heartless edict of officialism Standard Four was presided over by a woman.

The slightness of the shoulders selected to bear the burden of responsibility accentuated the cruelty of the arrangement, for the teacher of Standard Four was a frail little woman—scarcely more than a girl—certainly not very far into her twentieth year. Yet she was by no means inefficient. Cold blue eyes, a thin-lipped mouth, white

teeth, delicate hands and feet—the former strangely strong and firm—a head small even for her infantile *physique*, all spoke of character and determination—a character and determination recognised by her pupils. They called her "The Little Teacher," and feared her as they did not fear the face of man. That did not prevent them, however, from doing their best to break through her iron rule—sometimes with momentary success, invariably with final rout.

Poor Little Teacher, hers was a difficult life! No wonder the voice that was naturally low and flexible became shrill and monotonous, that the blue eyes, gay originally, waxed steel-like and hard, and that the keen, thin-lipped mouth grew scornful and harsh. Once—and once only—was her sternly-impassive demeanour broken, and ever after the occasion was spoken of in Standard Four with bated breath. A clumsy lout, the bully of the class, rebellious at being "kept in," defied the Little Teacher, and she thrashed him effectively, the blue

eyes blazing like a tropical sky and the thin lips white and set. Then she dismissed the class, and, sitting down at her desk, fainted.

Only one person witnessed this conclusive triumph of womanly weakness, and that was the Monitor. He was a rapidly-promoted new boy, with big black eyes, a big head, and brain aflame with the love of books. He had descended into the Little Teacher's life as though sent from the gods. His eager attention, his mobile face, his observant black eyes, his quaint use of book-English, gained him the hatred of his school-mates, but rendered him dear to the Little Teacher. He was her audience; to interest him she read up her subjects laboriously, and gave her own love of lucid Saxon free play. He asked her an all-comprehending question in history that she could not answer, and she spent a week's leisure in searching out and shaping a reply to his interrogation. His reading from the school primer was a revelation to

the class and a delight to the Little Teacher. Rapid, declamatory, and crammed with mispronunciations, it was yet so eloquent, so spirited, and, above all, so instinct with imaginative life, that her own *penchant* for literature was rekindled in the Little Teacher's breast, and she vaguely looked to the Monitor for sympathy and even aid.

When the Little Teacher came to upon this memorable occasion, she found her head pillowed upon a boyish breast, and a wet handkerchief travelling quietly over her brow and cheeks in the slow, accustomed fashion significant of an experienced nurse. She glanced up, and beheld the Monitor.

"Don't speak for a few moments," he said in his clear young voice. "You will be better soon. Shall I call someone? I thought you would rather not."

"No, no," protested the Little Teacher anxiously. "I am all right now."

She struggled to rise in her chair, but fell back.

"Do not sit up yet," demurred the Monitor; "it will go off if you lie still. My mother's always do. I nurse her, you know."

The Little Teacher lay passively against the Monitor's shoulder, enjoying the feel of the supporting arm and the cool strokes of the handkerchief. The sun came and looked in at the window—he always shone on the Little Teacher's desk during her dinner time—and a cart rumbled by outside. The school was very quiet, and everything was still. Suddenly the clock chimed half-past twelve.

"Had you not better have your dinner?" suggested the Monitor, thoughtfully. "It is getting on, and you will be tired, you know, after fainting, if you do not eat something."

She smiled wanly at his chivalric air, and at the literary speech which sat so incongruously on his boyish lips, but allowed him to raise her, nevertheless. He watched her as she brushed back her dishevelled hair, and then turned to go.

She drew out her parcel of bread-and-butter, and flushed unreasonably as his chance glance fell on it.

"You have a long way to go," she said to him; "have you not?"

He assented gravely.

"But I am stopping to dinner," he explained, as though to anticipate her regrets.

An impulse of loneliness came upon her.

"Won't you bring your dinner here?" she asked, flushing again—most ridiculously, for the Monitor was but some twelve years old.

The Monitor himself flushed this time, and brought out his lunch. It was simply bread-and-butter tied up in a neat package.

Their eyes met in a glance of pity—hers for his scanty fare, his for hers.

But the Little Teacher was not to be thrown off her balance for long, even by the Monitor's grave ways. From feeling slightly hysterical she became cheerful, and chattered on upon the subjects she knew he loved, until the Monitor's eyes were

flashing and his face quivering with mental animation. At last the warmth of the high noon sunbeams died away out of the room, the cracked bell rang outside for school-time, and the Little Teacher awoke to real life.

"Thank you for being so good to me," she said to the Monitor, and held out her hand. He took it, and his eyes travelled over her with a look of appreciation that made her blush. She wondered how she could repay him.

"Will you come to tea with me on Saturday?" she inquired, with a sudden thought.

The Monitor coloured with pleasure.

"I shall be very glad indeed," he replied.

"At four o'clock, then," said the Little Teacher.

* * * * * *

But when four o'clock on Saturday came, there came also a brief note from the Monitor saying that his mother and he had

been called suddenly to London, and he did not know when they would return. They might, he added, have to live there. He was sorry, he said, to leave school, and sorriest of all not to be able to come to tea. And when the Little Teacher put the note away in her desk there were tears on it. Poor Little Teacher!

* * * * * *

The days spun round as fast as the wheels in the factories, and the town and the Board School grew grimier than ever. But no news of the Monitor came to the Little Teacher, and she grew hard and cold, and felt more and more tired year by year. But she never fainted again. Perhaps it was because—— But there! it is silly guessing at such things. Poor Little Teacher!

* * * * * *

A Literary Man was entertained at dinner by the Chairman of the School Board. In

his boyhood the Literary Man had been a scholar at the Mediterranean Street Board School, and the Board was proud of the fact. He was young, this Literary Man—only some twenty-two or so. His had been a very rapid success. It was a testimony, said the Chairman of the Board, to the perfection of our modern elementary education. There were speeches and toasts and reports in the morning papers. Next day the Literary Man, the Chairman of the Board, and several members of the Board itself, visited the school in Mediterranean Street, and the children sat up primly as the Literary Man reviewed, one by one, the grimy apartments he recollected so well.

"This is the Fourth Standard Room," observed the Head Master, as he opened a door and allowed the Literary Man to pass in.

"Yes," remarked the Literary Man, in a voice which was so very clear and distinct that the Chairman of the Board looked at him as well as the children in the desks. "I was in the Fourth Standard when I left."

The Head Master turned to the Little Teacher.

"No trouble with your class at all, I hope," he said, calling her by her name.

The Little Teacher did not answer, but tottered and would have fallen, had not the Literary Man caught her in his arms.

"Allow me," interposed the Head Master, and would have taken her, but the Literary Man shook his head. He dropped on to one knee and settled the Little Teacher more comfortably.

"Some water," he commanded shortly, and drew out his handkerchief.

When the Little Teacher felt the cold drops upon her forehead she opened her eyes slightly.

"They make a terrible noise in the playground, Monitor," she complained. "Put out the geography books and clean the board."

The Literary Man rocked her to and fro half-unconsciously.

"*S-s-sh!*" he whispered, soothingly.

The Little Teacher sighed heavily.

"Have some of my bread and butter, Monitor," she said; "you have a long way to go."

"*S-s-sh!*" said the Literary Man.

The Little Teacher opened her eyes wide and looked at him.

"You never came to tea," she murmured, "though I waited years and years."

A big tear fell from the Literary Man's eyes.

"Don't cry, Monitor," besought the Little Teacher. "You remember 'The Little Match Girl.' She was in the Third Royal Reader then. You remember you read it so nicely. They found her in the snow, didn't they? . . . It's cold, isn't it . . . . . and snowing outside? Come in to tea, Monitor, you've been a long time."

Still the big tears dropped on her face.

"I am better, I think," said the Little Teacher. "You may lift me up now."

The Monitor lifted her up and kissed her on the forehead. Then he laid her down for ever.

HIS INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY

"THERE MET HIM A WOMAN . . . SUBTIL OF HEART."

The Book of Proverbs.

HIS INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY.

A Story in Scenes.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ:

THE LITTLE WIFE	*Ætat* 30.
THE MARRIED MAN	„ 39.
THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY	„ 25.
THE CANDID FRIEND	*Age uncertain.*

SCENE I.

DE TROP.

Landing-place of the Avonford ferryboat. Summer evening. The river ripples past the pontoons of the stage with a restless murmur. The squat steamer sways at her

hawser; the air vibrates with the roar from her escape-pipe. In the distance lies Harford City. Down one of the long, slender gangways the passengers for the return trip dribble in twos and threes. Up the other stroll slowly THE MARRIED MAN *and* THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY. *He is tall, fair, has a light moustache, blue eyes, and is scrupulously, though quietly dressed, in the "man about town" style. He wears coloured linen, a scarf-pin, and gaiters.* THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *is tall and dark. She is dressed in black, and has a fine, full figure. Her eyes are violet, and do not droop when they encounter the gaze of a stranger. Her hair comes low down on her forehead; she wears a black veil, a shirt-front, and a scarf of black satin, fastened at the belt with a big gold safety-pin. As they reach the top of the gangway* THE CANDID FRIEND *nears them upon the sidewalk. He is of medium height, gaunt, frock-coated, and has an unprepossessing face, with brilliant dark eyes and a bitter mouth.*

THE MARRIED MAN (*continuing the conversation*)—A sad little story, Miss Wallis; quite the most powerful of recent novels. They meet years after both of them have contracted ties and undertaken duties which keep them apart. And, alas! they recognise, when it is too late, that each is the other's affinity. I will lend you the book if you care to read it, so I mustn't spoil your pleasure by telling you the end. But I don't know when I read a book which affected **me so** strongly. (*Continues the conversation.*)

THE CANDID FRIEND (*seeing them; whistling*) :—

"Oh, this is no my ain lassie,
Fair tho' the lassie be."

(*Overtaking them*)—Good evening, Ned; good evening, Miss Wallis. (*To the* MARRIED MAN.) How is Mrs. Broughton?

THE MARRIED MAN—Very well, Tom, very well.

THE CANDID FRIEND—And the children?

THE MARRIED MAN—I haven't heard of anything being wrong, so I conclude—(*laughs expressively and throws out one hand in a gesture of dismissal*).

(*They walk on. There is a pause.*)

THE MARRIED MAN—Glorious view, Tom.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*cut short in his subdued whistling*)—

". . . No my ain lassie."

Eh? (*looking out over the river*)—Yes, the Swan is a lovely stream, Ned. I remember once rowing up to Halliwell's Bridge in the dusk. I shall never forget how wonderfully delicate the willows looked against the faint glory of the rising moon.

THE MARRIED MAN—Dangerous sculling, up there by the weir in the dark.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*absently*)—Oh, she used to steer very well in those days.

(*The* MARRIED MAN *and the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *exchange glances.*)

THE MARRIED MAN—You're quite sentimental, Tom. Is it the weather, or won't the new book come right? By-the-bye, what is it to be called?

THE CANDID FRIEND—I can't quite make up my mind. You see it depends upon the last chapter—a psychologist should be able to tell the ending of a novel from a perfect title.

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—And can't you make up your mind about the last chapter, Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Not quite, Miss Wallis. You see, like Dickens, I study my characters from real people, and sometimes my models won't do anything decided enough for an ending.

THE MARRIED MAN—Then you make one, I suppose, Tom.

THE CANDID FRIEND—No.

THE MARRIED MAN—What then?

THE CANDID FRIEND—I wait.

(*There is an awkward silence.*)

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—What is the book about, Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Well, it would take rather too long to tell. But, in my own mind, I call it—to distinguish it from my other plots, you see—*Her Duty of Marriage.*

THE MARRIED MAN—What on earth, Tom——?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Well, I'm not a modern, I know. I rather believe in that clause of the Church Service which says something about "Till death do us part."

THE MARRIED MAN—Well, who disbelieves in it?

THE CANDID FRIEND—There are many ways of disbelieving in it. My book has built itself upon a certain passage in the Old Testament about "Her food, her raiment, and her duty of marriage thou shalt not diminish."

THE MARRIED MAN (*quizzically*)—*Tom!*

THE CANDID FRIEND—Yes, I know what

you're going to say, that that doesn't mean anything very exalted. But I've tried to tell a story which, to my mind, transfigures the phrase with a fresh meaning.

THE MARRIED MAN—What phrase?

THE CANDID FRIEND—"Her duty of marriage." I've been reading that book of Poynter's, you know, the one just out—what's its title—*Unconsummate*, isn't it? The one about the intellectual bigamist. He who marries a girl of twenty, and then plays with fire in the shape of an "affinity." If I do my story justice it will form a sort of unpremeditated counterblast to Poynter's dangerous drivel.

THE MARRIED MAN (*uncomfortably*)—You don't really think the book dangerous, Tom?

THE CANDID FRIEND—I do. Is a man to console himself with the idea that he may be faithless to his wife in mind and soul, because he is true to her with his miserable body? Humanity has been capable of some very ugly worship of the letter at

the expense of the spirit, but I think that heresy breaks the record. *Camaraderie* and intellectual *rapport* are as much a woman's right as physical tenderness and bodily intimacy.

THE MARRIED MAN—But suppose it isn't possible? Suppose, say, the woman isn't capable of it?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Suppose she's never been given a chance, Ned?

THE MARRIED MAN—Ah, well, Tom, I know your pet theories. Wait till you've had more experience. No one like Tom for thinking that he knows "mankind from China to Peru" by sheer intuition, eh, Miss Wallis?

(*The* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *raises her eyes to meet those of the* MARRIED MAN. *Instead they encounter the piercing gaze of the* CANDID FRIEND, *and fall uneasily. There is another pause, during which the* CANDID FRIEND *looks out across the darkening water.*)

THE CANDID FRIEND—Experience, Ned! Pain is a better teacher than sentiment. Miss Wallis, I spoke of rowing up the river once to Halliwell's Bridge. That was many years ago. The lady who steered me was then as quick-witted and wise as she was merry and sympathetic. She married a man as decent as Ned here (*with a glance at the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY), a really good fellow (*he puts his hand on the* MARRIED MAN'S *arm*), big-hearted and tender as a woman. To-day she is merely the mother of his children, an outlaw from his intellectual being, absolutely incapable of understanding the best part of him, or of comprehending his worthiest aims in life.

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—How did that happen, Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND (*curtly*)—Children chiefly. Masculine superiority as a factor.

THE MARRIED MAN—Tom, you're in a perfectly brutal mood to-day. Who's been treading on your mental toes?

THE CANDID FRIEND—No one, no one. This is your corner, Miss Wallis, I believe.

(*Again the eyes of the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *rise to catch those of the* MARRIED MAN, *and meet the cold glance of the* CANDID FRIEND.)

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—Ah, yes, of course; I was so interested in your talk I never noticed.

(*There is the usual hand-shaking.*)

THE MARRIED MAN—If you'll call round on your way home from the lecture to-night, Miss Wallis, I'll let you have that book.

THE CANDID FRIEND—Still as devoted students as ever. Who this time?

THE MARRIED MAN (*embarrassed*)—Miss Wallis thought she'd like to read your detested Poynter.

THE CANDID FRIEND—Oh, yes. What did I say was its title? *Un—un*——

THE MARRIED MAN (*as though struck with remembrance*)—*Unconsummate.*

THE CANDID FRIEND—Ah, yes! though I think the title might possibly not fit in with my theory.

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—What theory was that, Mr. Couch?

THE MARRIED MAN—Yes, you have so many, Tom.

THE CANDID FRIEND—Oh, about titles and endings.

(*The* MARRIED MAN'S *mouth twitches at the corners; the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *looks sulky and unconcerned; the eyes of the* CANDID FRIEND *burn more brilliantly than ever.*)

THE CANDID FRIEND—I think I'm coming your way, Ned. Good-evening, Miss Wallis.

(*The* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *turns down a side street; the men go off arm in arm.*)

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE II.

"THE MEREST STRAW."

Sitting-room of "The Willows," Avonford. "The Willows" is a detached villa standing

in about half an acre of ground. The room is very handsomely furnished, and in style is significant of a considerable amount of worldly prosperity. Dinner is over. The MARRIED MAN *and the* CANDID FRIEND *sit on either side of the fire. The children are in for their good-night ten minutes with "father." A twelve-year-old girl sits on a buffet at the foot of the* CANDID FRIEND. *The other children are clustered round the* MARRIED MAN. *In a big rocking-chair by the table sits the* LITTLE WIFE, *with a baby in her arms.* MAUD, *the twelve-year-old, and the* CANDID FRIEND *are talking in a confidential undertone.*

MAUD (*softly*)—And did you love the lady very much, Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND (*brushing her hair from her forehead and kissing it*)—Very much, dearie.

MAUD—What was she like?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Very like you, dear. (*He glances at the* LITTLE WIFE

sitting under the glow of the chandelier.) Blue eyes, brown hair, and such a tender, laughing little mouth!

MAUD (*discursively*)—I got top in history and arithmetic to-day, Mr. Couch. Alice Hay beat me in spelling, though. Mr. Bredner wrote something on my composition that I don't understand. I thought he would cane me for it, but he didn't. I'll go and fetch it for you to see.

(*She runs off. The* CANDID FRIEND *watches the* LITTLE WIFE *and listens to the children's babble about him. Presently* MAUD *returns.*)

MAUD (*breathlessly, and displaying her exercise book*)—This is it, Mr. Couch. (*The thin volume is open at an essay on "Trees." Across one corner is scribbled in blue pencil, "Spelling disgraceful: composition highly meritorious."*) (*Critically*)—M-e-r-i, meri, t-o-r-i, tori, o-u-s, ous—meritorious. What is that, Mr. Couch? Something very bad?

THE CANDID FRIEND—No, dear; it means

that the essay itself is good—has much merit. Of course, as he says, you do spell badly, Maudie.

MAUD—Mamma spells badly, Mr. Couch. She didn't know how to spell "etymology," and I learned it the other day. Did your lady spell good, Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND—No, Maudie; she was as bad as . . . as . . your mother.

MAUD (*excitedly*)—Oh, I'll tell her; she'll like to know.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*detaining her*)—No, Maudie, you must never tell her.

Maud (*sitting down*)—Why?

THE CANDID FRIEND (*vaguely*)—I don't want anyone but you to know about the lady.

MAUD (*in a whisper*)—Is it a secret, Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Yes, Maud. Yours and mine.

(*There is a pause.*)

MAUD—Could she have spelled "etymology," Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Not to save her life, Maud.

MAUD—What else couldn't she spell?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Love, Maud.

MAUD—L-o-v-e, love. Oh, that's easy, Mr. Couch. How did she spell it?

THE CANDID FRIEND—R-e-s-p-e-c-t.

MAUD (*to herself*)—How *very* strange.

* * * * * *

THE MARRIED MAN—Now run away, children. Good-night, Maud: good-night, Victor: good-night, James—James, how dirty your hands are! Aren't you going to say good-night to father, Maudie?

MAUD (*kissing him*)—Good-night, father. I've got a secret. It's mine and Mr. Couch's. We made it to-night.

THE MARRIED MAN—Mr. Couch is a bad man to have secrets with my little daughter.

MAUD (*laughing and shaking her curls*)—I like it, father.

(*The children go off with the maid. The*

LITTLE WIFE *follows them, glancing apologetically at her husband and the* CANDID FRIEND.)

THE CANDID FRIEND—Bonny children, those of yours, Ned.

THE MARRIED MAN—Yes. If you'd to keep them though—!

THE CANDID FRIEND—Scarcely worth the price you've paid for them, Ned, are they?

THE MARRIED MAN—What the deuce do you mean, Tom?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Mrs. Broughton's far from well, isn't she?

THE MARRIED MAN—Oh, a cold or something.

THE CANDID FRIEND—Ned, my friend, she's pulled to bits with those children. Can't you see?

THE MARRIED MAN—Well, I tell her to leave them to the maids and take more exercise herself.

THE CANDID FRIEND—Ned, they are her children and yours. You owe them at least

a good training, and a maid can't give that. My experience is that it's your maid-trained children who go to the devil. Of course your wife wants to look after them herself.

THE MARRIED MAN—Well, then, I suppose it can't be helped. She might have some regard for me, though. But there, they say when a woman becomes a mother her husband loses half her love.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*dryly*)—Ay, they say, and it's one of those "they says" which are mostly lies.

THE MARRIED MAN—You're very surly to-night, old man. Is anything wrong?

THE CANDID FRIEND—No; nothing. I feel a little like Hamlet the Dane. (*Quotes mock-dramatically*):—

> The time is out of joint:—O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!

That book of Poynter's has given me a fit of literary indigestion.

THE MARRIED MAN—Oh, that reminds me that I have to send it to Miss Wallis. Excuse me a moment, Tom.

THE CANDID FRIEND—Certainly, Ned.

(*The* MARRIED MAN *goes out.*)

(*The* CANDID FRIEND *crosses to the table. By the shaded lamp lies a heap of linen, the* LITTLE WIFE'S *needle thrust through its folds. He stoops and kisses the soft pile.*)

THE CANDID FRIEND (*to himself*)—R-e-s-p-e-c-t.

(*The* LITTLE WIFE *enters unperceived.*)

THE CANDID FRIEND (*easily*)—You don't mind my appropriating one of your needles, Mrs. Broughton? I've been picking a small splinter out of my finger.

THE LITTLE WIFE (*with concern*)—Let me look, Mr. Couch (*takes his hand in her two soft ones*). Where is it?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Where *was* it, Mrs. Broughton—I don't think I could find that now. It was a very tiny one (*brushes his hands together*).

THE LITTLE WIFE (*laying her hand on his*)

—Mr. Couch, is anything the matter with my husband?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Why, does anything seem wrong, Mrs. Broughton?

THE LITTLE WIFE (*sadly*)—No. Nothing very definite. He seems to have turned from me—at heart, I mean. Oh, he is good—very good to me—. . . I—I am not worthy of such love! But lately he has—(*her eyes endeavour to meet those of the* CANDID FRIEND, *but fall before they meet them*)—he has not kissed me for over a week. I—I thought perhaps he was not well—you were once a doctor, Mr. Couch.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*soothingly*)—I—I—These things come and go, Mrs. Broughton. One can only wait; he may change with as little apparent reason; do not worry him.

THE LITTLE WIFE—He—he seems very fond of our children, Mr. Couch.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*to himself*)—Oh, Ned, Ned Broughton, if you could hear and understand that *our!* (*Aloud*) Remarkably Mrs. ——

THE LITTLE WIFE (*warningly*)—*S-sh-h!* Here he is.

(*The* MARRIED MAN *enters with an open book. He sits down in an arm-chair by the fire and continues his reading. The* CANDID FRIEND *picks up the evening paper, and the* LITTLE WIFE *takes up her sewing. There is dead silence for half-an-hour. At the end of that time there is a ring, and the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *is shown in.*)

THE MARRIED MAN (*rising and closing his book to shake hands*)—Good evening, Miss Wallis, you come to brighten us up. We were very dull.

(*The* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *touches the* LITTLE WIFE'S *hands and accepts the chair offered by the* CANDID FRIEND.)

THE CANDID FRIEND (*as he places it*)—Good evening, Miss Wallis. The lecture is over early, isn't it?

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—No; I felt rather tired, so I didn't go, and then I

thought I might as well come round for the book Mr. Broughton promised me.

THE LITTLE WIFE—I never knew a book that interested Ned so. He has not touched any other print—except his newspaper—for days.

THE CANDID FRIEND—It is a remarkable story, Mrs. Broughton. Have you not read it?

THE LITTLE WIFE—(*bluntly*)—No.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*to himself*)—That's a plump lie. (*Aloud*) I shall be interested to know your opinion of the book; your husband and I disagree over it somewhat strongly. (*To himself*) I don't suppose for a moment you'll do anything but say that the book is by a heaven-sent genius, especially after that lie. (*Aloud*) Didn't I see you reading *Life's Jog-trot* on the boat yesterday, Miss Wallis? What do you think of Weatherley's work?

(*The* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *catches the conversational ball, tosses it to the* MARRIED MAN, *and the game proceeds briskly.*)

THE LITTLE WIFE (*thinking*)—That cough of Muriel's seemed quite croupy to-night; I wonder if she is warm enough in those light flannels. September is sometimes very cold in the mornings. Victor *will* run on and leave her to drag so slowly to school. I wonder if he's keeping quite as nice now he's with other boys. I couldn't bear him to grow impudent, and perhaps . . . . (*Her thoughts cease to form themselves into words, and flow on in a current of apprehensive brain-waves.*)

THE MARRIED MAN (*in the conversation*)—Well, I confess I think that our views of marriage need altering. So many women seem to think that marriage should give them a right to monopolise their husbands.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*with a touch of seriousness in his banter*)—For Heaven's sake, spare your wife's feelings!

THE MARRIED MAN (*with a little laughing glance at his wife*)—Oh, Maud is sensible. But I think that Poynter is right when he says that marriage with one woman is not necessarily death to friendship with others.

THE CANDID FRIEND—*Vide* a certain playwright, "A man's happiness consists in the women he has *not* married," eh, Ned? I think it depends upon what you mean by friendship. Let us ask Mrs. Broughton what she would call proper friendship between women and a married man.

(Three pairs of eyes turn themselves upon the Little Wife.)

THE LITTLE WIFE (*gravely*)—I think a married man ought to be good to other women *because* of his wife. It is dangerous for him to be good to any other woman for her own sake. Except, of course, his mother or sister.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*to himself*)—*Très bon, madame la femme!* I thought you hadn't lost all your old wit.

(*The conversation flags, gathers itself together, is reinforced with a new subject or two, and settles down into a steady flow until supper-time.*)

(*The table being laid, the* LITTLE WIFE *takes the foot, the* MARRIED MAN *the head of the table. The* CANDID FRIEND *sits on his left, the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *on his right.*

THE LITTLE WIFE—Tea, Miss Wallis, or coffee?

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—Tea, thank you, Mrs. Broughton.

THE LITTLE WIFE—Mr. Couch?

THE CANDID FRIEND—Coffee, please.

THE LITTLE WIFE—Ned?

THE MARRIED MAN (*carving cold meat*)—I don't know, my dear, at present. Wait till I've got through with this. (*He proceeds to serve the slices.*)

THE MARRIED MAN (*handing a plate*)—Maud.

THE LITTLE WIFE (*putting down her coffee-cup*)—Thank you, dear. And now will you have tea or coffee?

THE MARRIED MAN—Tea, please.

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—Coffee

always makes my head ache when I take it at night.

THE MARRIED MAN (*passing the bread-and-butter*)—So it does mine.

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY—No; brown, please.

THE LITTLE WIFE—White, Ned. Thank you.

(*The* MARRIED MAN *sets down the plates and takes a piece of brown bread and butter. As the* LITTLE WIFE *hands him his tea-cup, his eyes fall on the plate and cup of the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY.)

THE MARRIED MAN (*with a laugh*)—Curious how our tastes agree, isn't it, Miss Wallis?

(*The* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *raises her eyes to meet his. The* CANDID FRIEND *intercepts the glance—almost politely.*)

THE INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY (*with a vapid giggle*)—There is quite an affinity between us, Mr. Broughton.

THE CANDID FRIEND (*to himself, with a glance at the* LITTLE WIFE'S *face*)—Damn that girl; she's done it now!

(*The* LITTLE WIFE *sets down her coffee-cup behind the tea-urn with a pout of dislike, and pushes away her piece of white bread.*)

THE CANDID FRIEND (*to himself*)—A chance! a mere chance! and it's roused her suspicions. God help Maud Broughton to-night, and many another night!

(*The conversation ripples on amid the jingle of knives and forks. From behind the tall silver urn the* LITTLE WIFE *watches the* MARRIED MAN *and the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *with eyes of wide dismay.*)

[*Curtain.*]

SCENE III.

WERE THERE EVER ANY WRITHED NOT AT PASSED JOY?"

(*The dressing-room of the* MARRIED MAN. *It is half-an-hour after midnight, and the apartment is in darkness. Suddenly, under the door leading into the Broughtons' sleeping-chamber, there steals a yellow glow, and a light footstep is heard. Slowly the door opens and the* LITTLE WIFE, *lamp in hand, enters. Her thick brown hair is loose on her shoulders, and beneath her dressing-gown her white night-gear peeps pathetically.*

(*She crosses to the mantelshelf, which is littered with pictures and letters. On a bracket in the centre stands an unframed cabinet portrait of herself. Pictures of the children stand against vases and nick-nacks. The* LITTLE WIFE *searches among the litter and picks out a fine cabinet of the* INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY. *With rapid*

fingers she gathers those of the children and herself together and places them in a small pile. Using them as a pedestal, she stands the photo of the INTELLECTUAL AFFINITY *upon the bracket in place of her own. She pauses, surveying her handiwork for a few moments, and then sits down in her husband's chair by his writing-table.*

(*From the adjoining room there comes the sound of the* MARRIED MAN'S *regular, heavy breathing as he sleeps.*)

THE LITTLE WIFE (*her face dropping into her hands*)—Ned, my Ned!

[*Curtain.*]

DESUNT CÆTERA.

FRITZ AND I

"And I heard a voice from Heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps."

Saint John the Divine.

FRITZ AND I.

WE came out of the Haymarket together—I, the authoritative dramatic critic, and Fritz—Fritz the singer, Fritz the player, Fritz the war-correspondent, Fritz the King of Bohemia.

"Is it to be home and supper, or the office and 'copy,' my friend?" inquired the big Teuton lazily, as we stood taking luxurious draughts of the night air.

"Hang 'copy'!" I retorted, with a gust of anger.

Fritz put his hand on my shoulder and bent me bodily backwards, throwing my face into the light. Then he restored my equilibrium with the same careless ease, and took my arm.

"I shall interpret that flat blasphemy against the Fourth Estate as indicating a

preference for baked meats and Poplar," he remarked, "and so, as I detest cabs only one degree less than 'buses, we will walk. A man with eyes and lips like yours should be made to do twenty miles before trying to sleep. I say 'trying,' because no man who looks as you did in the gaslight a second ago, ever does sleep much without laudanum."

I did not speak, and we walked on, leaving the city behind us by short cuts through quarters of doubtful respectability.

At last Fritz spoke, with a German tenderness in his deep baritone.

"The Past looked out through your eyes just now, *lieber freund*," he said softly; "what has chanced to remind you that man's life consisteth not in the things which he *possesseth?*"

"I'm all right," I growled; "nothing but over-work and the under-ventilation of our public buildings."

"*Ach*, you English! Always ashamed of the vulgarity of owning a soul," laughed Fritz, a little sadly, and we were silent again until

we came to the two rooms which he rented from a docker's wife in a sombre street in Poplar.

* * * * * *

"Take the hammock, most august critic," suggested Fritz's voice, as a light sprang into being in the Tartarean gloom. "I think you will find it soothe your complaint more than your tragic state of mind will allow you to confess."

I threw myself into the familiar cradle, whose dark cords always gave off a scent of brine, and the light came towards me in the hand of my friend. He set it down and leant over me.

"Poor poet!" he said, "why will you try to be respectable and a dramatic critic?"

"Don't chaff, Fritz!" I protested, wearily; "if being a poet is to be more miserable than the devils in hell, then, God knows, you are right, and a greater than Shakespeare is here. Go and play to me, as David did to Saul."

The big, loosely-knit figure of Fritz stooped

over me again. He put his cool fingers on my forehead. "So she believed in God, and would not kiss one of His poets," he said quietly.

"What the——!" I began angrily, springing up. He pressed me down again with his strong palm on my breast.

"Lie still, dear lad," he commanded, dropping into a caressing English phrase, "while I go play."

He sat down at his piano, the costliness and beauty of which had often puzzled me, and struck a chord. Then he rose, and put out the light.

"Darkness for a mind diseased," he explained as he returned to the instrument. The gleam of a street-lamp outside the window fell on his golden-brown hair and beard, and on the long white hands that flashed to and fro over the keys.

* * * * * *

Perplexing harmonies filled the gloomy sitting-room—harmonies that rose and fell

and died away in each other—*culs-de-sac* of sound leading nowhere—sombre sphinx-music without melody. I tossed miserably. Was this Fritz's healing?

Almost imperceptibly there grew upon the ear, flowing out of that persistent sea of swelling chords, a delicate thrill of rippling music, airy as a chime of silver bells, fascinating as the flower-chorus in *Martha*. Louder and louder, the developing *motif* dominated the swell of troublous harmonies, driving them back with the crisp foam of its buoyant happiness. Its very gaiety jarred upon me in my desolate mood. Suddenly a new note sounded, a grave and reverent one, and the melodious laughter died away before its advance. The cramped walls about me seemed to tremble and fall aside. It might have been the pealing of an organ through dim and vaulted aisles, that throbbing tide of stately intervals which came from the quivering instrument in the shadows. Then through the rolling anthem a human voice seemed to penetrate in a divinely glorious

treble. The strain was the Song of the Creatures around the Throne—"*Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty.*" Oh, my heart, the wonder and the splendour of that song—her song! Was it the keys beneath the flying fingers, or was it her voice in the very words?

> "Holy! Holy! Holy! There is none beside Thee
> Perfect in power, in love, in purity."

Thereat some great host of singers seemed to take up the song and chant it in echoing thunders like the roar of rushing cataracts, while her voice, clear and sweet as a seraph's, leapt to the mighty octaves and soared into sphere-harmonies beyond the reach of the straining ear.

"Fritz! Fritz! for God's sake have mercy! Is it not enough to have lost her, but you must conjure me up a vision of her singing in Heaven?"

"Poor poet!" said my friend's inexpressibly tender voice through the darkness, as the song died into the unintelligible harmonies of

the prelude, played so softly as to be almost inaudible. "Poor poet, trying to become respectable! It is a tearful little story, yours. You met her in a world of platitudes, a world whose God is a platitude—and you saw her beauty and truth and the loveliness of her soul, and you twined your heartstrings about her. Howbeit, you were a mad poet, seeking after God and finding Him not, and cursing the evil of the people's lives, and the wanton Deity that had made man in His own image, and given him sorrow for a guerdon. Yet because you were an Ishmael, against whom was every man's hand, she loved you and told you so; and because you were an iconoclast, whose strong right arm was against everything called God, she hated you, and bade you go. Wherefore she died, as women will who break their heart upon the nether millstone of their conscience. Poor poet! You grew respectable because *your* heart was broken, and you thought you could forget. And now you find you cannot. Poor poet! Poor poet!"

The sphinx-music of the prelude again gave way, and to a passion of grief. The music wailed and sobbed in dirges of godless despair, it moaned through abysses of unutterable hopelessness; it murmured in monotones of apathetic misery, it stormed in gusts of frenzied madness. At last it ceased in a sob like the breaking of a child's heart. And while I lay shaken with convulsive grief, the enigmatic harmonies whispered again.

"Have you no hope, dear friend?" asked the voice of Fritz.

"None!" I told him tearlessly, "none!"

"No hope!" repeated Fritz, and the harmonies murmured softly—"No hope! and the God of Love reigneth! No hope!" He struck a majestic chord.

"No!" said I, "none." But a burst of sweeping melody drowned the words.

Oh, that music! You will never play like that again, friend Fritz, though I lie many a long evening in the ancient hammock that the sea-breezes have blown upon, while you talk to your God in the music of the spheres.

"No!" I had answered, "no hope!"

And the music laughed at the thought—laughed so merrily, so wisely, so bravely, so lovingly, that I laughed with it, wondering at myself the while.

And, lo, the laughter swelled into a sea of happy sounds, into a universe of radiant life. There were discords in the music, just as there were minor notes and plaintive phrases; but the whole was grand, and sweet, and confident of all good. And one knew that the music marched and swept, and danced and rolled into all infinitude, because it was a pulse of the great Life of God. So I dared not say any more "I hope not," for I knew that the God of the music was a glad God and a good, and that my lady's spirit waits for me somewhere in the great universe through which there swept that glorious song of Life and Love and God.

* * * * * *

I do not know what Fritz played after that. Anthem and mass, recitative and chorus—

with all their varying reverence and beauty he fed the new-born faith and peace within me. And my hope and trust grew strong and firm in that grave, pure atmosphere of melody; I knew that God is, that somewhere I should look my love in the eyes, and that beneath His smile our lips should meet.

* * * * * *

"Good-night," said Fritz, when I stepped into the grimy street beneath the eternal stars, and then, with a sudden impulse of his German heart, he kissed me on both cheeks and shut the door.

A TANGLE

"HER END IS BITTER AS WORMWOOD."

The Book of Proverbs.

A TANGLE.

"MISS IRESON to see you, sir."

"Miss who?"

"Miss Ireson, sir."

Reuben Shaw looked down at the envelope he had just blotted. It was directed :—

"Miss Ruth Ireson,
13, Wellington Villas,
Kensington, W."

"What am I to say, sir?"

The man addressed started from the contemplation of his own handwriting, and answered sombrely,

"I will see her."

"At once, sir?"

"At once."

As the outer door of his chambers closed

behind the attendant, Reuben Shaw reached one hand to a picture that hung beside him, and turned its face to the wall. It was the half-length portrait of a woman—a strong, tender woman, with laughter lurking in the mouth and eyes, and satire hinted in the delicate nostrils.

Having averted this pleasant vision he fell to studying the envelope destined for the lady who had saved him a penny postage-stamp by calling in person.

"Miss Ireson, sir."

A determined little figure in grey stepped forward, and the door closed once more.

"Good morning, Reuben," observed his visitor quietly.

Reuben Shaw did not move.

Miss Ireson, after tapping one foot impatiently on the worn carpet a moment, crossed it swiftly and bent over him, putting one hand on the back of his chair, the other on his knee. For a brief second Reuben took no notice of this lover-like gesture, then he caught her in a clasp that made her wince, and kissed her savagely.

Miss Ireson, with an incongruous air of half-pitying ownership, dropped a fiery salute upon his forehead, and released herself.

"Now we're friends again," she remarked, with the same air of tolerant possession, "but you've crumpled somebody's letter shockingly. I am very sorry, sir," with a mock curtsey, "but I'll tell you what—I'll write it over again, and you shall sign it and put 'Dictated' in the corner, as if I were your sec—why, it's for me!"

She pondered a moment.

"Reuben, is it cross?" she asked, with a sudden weary droop; "because, if it is, put it in the fire. Don't let's have any more, please."

Reuben Shaw rose slowly to his feet, pushed back his chair, and lifted Miss Ireson into the vacated position.

"Reuben, you hurt me!" she cried, but his grip tightened heedlessly.

"Read it," he said hoarsely, and fell to pacing up and down like a woman in pain. Thirty years after he could shut his eyes

and see that gloomy, paper-littered room, with the trim, small figure in the grey gown throned upon his big chair, reading the scrawled pages, and growing whiter and more rigid with every line.

She turned the leaf slowly.

"'*Yours very sincerely, Reuben Shaw,*'" she repeated in a scornful, far-away voice; "'*yours—very—sincerely.*'"

"Ruth! Ruth!" burst out Reuben Shaw, pausing in his walk, "for God's sake don't sneer! I have sometimes thought that if ever I ceased to love you it would be because of your sneers. They hurt my very soul."

"If ever you ceased!" she said; "then you do love me still! *No, no!*—let me think what it says."

She went off upon a strained, high recitative, innocent of full-stops.

"It says that you love me, and will never love anyone else; that your people are poor and that you are poor, and that I am poor, and that your mother wants you to marry someone who is very rich and very fond of

you; that you are going to do it for your people's sake, and that you are only 'mine very sincerely, Reuben Shaw.' . . . He is a wise man and a lawyer, this Reuben Shaw, and he knows:—

"'"'Tis as well to be off with the old love
Before you——'"

Her voice broke suddenly; she lifted her shoulders and burst out laughing. The unreal merriment ended abruptly.

"What is that picture with its face to the wall? Some woman, Lawyer Reuben, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

She ran across and turned it round.

"Ah, the rich woman, Reuben Shaw, by her diamond rings and lily-white hands. And hanging at your elbow for an inspiration. Tell me, is it not she? Of course it is; you must manage your face better, Lawyer Reuben, or you will never get on in your profession. What is her name? Since she is to supplant me I have a right to know."

"Isabel," said Shaw, bewildered into candour by her rapid changes of mood.

"'Isabel' already! Very well, Miss 'Isabel,'" and she set the portrait back against the wall with a long look at the pictured face.

Suddenly her whole attitude and expression changed to one of tenderness, and she came lightly across to his side.

"Do you know," she began gaily, "that I came here this morning on legal business, Reuben? Listen. My great-uncle, a very rich old man, who was a squire or something of that sort in Kent, has died, and there is no relation nearer than I. I saw his death in the papers. I am going to put in my claim, and so I came to ask if you would take my case, and make me a rich little woman. Then you needn't marry for money, but for love, and yet you will be as rich as you need wish to be, you mercenary boy. Will you take my case, Reuben dear?"

She studied him acutely while she built up her careful sentences—a wedded desperation of fear and love quivering in her voice—and saw with relief his indecision verge upon

surrender as her accustomed influence regained its hold.

The thrill of her restored empire vibrated into passion—a passion that flamed up in Reuben Shaw's eyes like an unexpected flame in sullen embers. He snatched her to him.

Miss Ireson flung her arms about him feverishly, and with a shuddering sigh, relapsed into quiescent enjoyment of his caresses. He bent to kiss her, but she put up a resolute hand and covered his mouth.

"Say you hate the Isabel creature," demanded Miss Ireson.

A flicker of dissent—the ghost of some shadowy doubt—passed over Reuben's face. In a second it was gone, and he began obediently.

"I hate the—— a moment, dear. Here is Hayes about something." He put her into his chair again.

"Well, Hayes?"

"Sir Alfred Scott to see you, sir. He says it is exceedingly important that he should speak with you for a few moments."

"Very well, Hayes, I will come down to the hall," said Reuben Shaw, and the door closed silently.

"He is the most famous counsel in London, my darling; *apropos*, we ought to have him for this case of yours. When I come back you must tell me all about it, little woman."

* * * * * *

"He did not say it. You will really make him love you, you wise woman," said Ruth to the pictured Isabel, "but you will never love him as I have done. It isn't in you—your nose is too thin."

She was studying her rival as she had done her lover, colourlessly, dispassionately, selflessly.

* * * * * *

"What are these things, Reuben?" asked Miss Ireson, when the door opened again.

"What things, my darling? Oh, don't touch them—they are some of the evidences in a murder case of mine. Mind, for God's

sake, Ruth! that dagger is poisoned. Don't laugh, darling, it is an ugly weapon for your hands to handle. See, this tiny bottle holds the same poison as is on the blade."

"What sort of poison is it?" persisted Miss Ireson.

"You morbid creature! The sort of poison that if I took a sip of it—don't be afraid, little woman, I'm not going to—would let me walk from here to the Tower without feeling anything wrong. Then I should go out like a candle in a draught."

"You are quite realistic, Reuben." Miss Ireson shivered slightly.

"Am I, dear? Come and sit down and talk business. About this great fortune of yours?"

Reuben Shaw pulled his swivel-chair up to the fire and sat down. Then he held out his arms.

"Come, little woman. Where *is* this wonderful inheritance?"

Miss Ireson leaned against the side-table, playing with the diminutive green bottle. It was a second before she answered.

"In the Region of Silence and Shadows."

"What do you mean, Ruth?" said Reuben Shaw, taken suddenly aback.

"That I lied to you, Reuben, my dear; I wanted you to make much of me once more before . . . Oh, I am only a poor little milliner, dressmaker, typewriter—what you will—after all. Now go and marry the Isabel creature and pay your family debts. As for me, I will go to my inheritance."

She drew the cork of the phial and tossed a few drops into her mouth.

Reuben Shaw leapt up, horrified.

"Nay, do not trouble to show me down," Miss Ireson protested laughingly, as she opened the door and stepped through. "Remember, I can get as far as the Tower before I go out like the candle in the draught. Good-morning, Lawyer Reuben, and . . . . . good-bye."

A MOCKER OF WOMEN

"I HAVE SEEN ALSO IN THE PROPHETS OF JERUSALEM AN HORRIBLE THING: THEY COMMIT ADULTERY AND WALK IN LIES; THEY STRENGTHEN ALSO THE HANDS OF EVIL-DOERS, THAT NONE DOTH RETURN FROM HIS WICKEDNESS."

The Most High God.

A MOCKER OF WOMEN.

A WOMAN sat in a stage-box, one white hand resting on the plush parapet, her eyes scanning the gaudy act-drop a little listlessly. She had not been in a theatre for ten years, and forgotten emotions stirred within her—dim mental echoes that saddened her as the lingering fall of a funeral-bell saddens the passer-by. A programme fluttered from the lofty gallery, and sank in eddying circles towards the pit. The commonplace incident touched some lever of Memory, the curtain of the Present rose from her eyes, and the Past lay before her in its ancient sunshine. Ten years ago a pale green slip had fallen, in just such fashion, from gallery to floor. She sat in the pit then, a young lover by her side—a lover with the fire of genius in his eyes and the flush of ambition on his forehead. She glanced down at her rich black silk, and sighed as she saw herself across the

decade, a lithe, sharply-featured girl in a shabby frock, with a faded blue handkerchief at her throat. She had been ashamed of her worn shoes, she remembered, and her feet instinctively drew themselves under her gown as the trivial detail flitted across her mind. Heigho! what a long time ago it was, and what a lot had happened in it! She had parted from her lover, had shot up into an eager, capable woman, had earned her own living with her pen, written half-a-dozen successful novels, and stepped into a foremost position in a great modern movement—all in the brief span of time that serves to link the diverse eras of youth and maturity.

The band was playing a medley of familiar airs, and a bar of "Annie Laurie" fell on her ears. She wondered what had become of her lover, whether he had attained that same renown of which they had dreamed together.

> "And for bonnie Annie Laurie,
> I would lay me down and die,"

shrilled the violins, repeating the high notes

of the refrain, and Memory struck in with a hard, metallic echo like a voice in a phonograph—"We should not understand each other, dear. I want someone with—with—you know——" That was what he had said to her, and she *had* known, or thought she had. So they had parted, and the agony of loss had touched some hidden spring of genius in her, and she had struck out for herself and struggled into Fame's haven. But hitherto she had seen nothing of him who had thrown her off that he might swim the better.

There was a click, the curtain moved a spasmodic inch, and then rose swiftly as the orchestra lapsed into silence by an unscored *diminuendo.* Something flashed across her brain a picture of the play they had seen together that night ten years ago. A poor little play it had been. Virtue had been righted at the last and the villain had been hissed to the scaffold. She had hissed, too, with her teeth set tight and anger in her heart, as the cruel betrayer slank across in

front of the curtain, and she had waved her kerchief and cheered involuntarily when the two lovers came hand-in-hand behind the glaring footlights. But her lover had lifted his young shoulders and laughed at it cynically. That was not life, he had said—life was a complex, sardonic thing, and the sun shone on the evil oftener than it did on the good. She had known that it was true, yet had known also in a vague way that it was in another sense all untrue. But she had held her tongue—she had a habit of holding her tongue—and had cherished the recollection of that poor little melodrama across many years of struggle and temptation to pessimism.

The curtain had risen on an Eastern scene. Mosque and minaret, fretted doorway and quaint gable made up the *ensemble* of an Oriental market-place. The "back-cloth" showed a sunny haven with hills beyond, and curiously-shapen galleys lying at their moorings. As the *corps de ballet* tripped down the stage, and sank into the voluptuous poses of an Eastern dance, Naomi Clifford

remembered the object of her visit She was to sit through and criticise a burlesque by a writer whose work, while enormously popular, had yet been described to her as corrupt and degrading to a degree almost Satanic. She was the editor of a woman's journal, and she had come, dispassionately enough, to see if these things were so. She settled herself in her chair to scan the performance closely.

When the action of the burlesque began to develop, Naomi turned her programme to the light and looked at the name of the librettist. "Adolf Carr"—a mixture of French and English. She set him down, with a bias of patriotism, as the former, for the play—so far as there was play—was thoroughly morbid. But the heart of Naomi Clifford quaked just a trifle as she watched with the shrewd eye of an experienced journalist. It was difficult to put her finger on a sentence or situation that was gross enough to shock the languid English public, yet the atmosphere of the thing was noisome to the nostrils of a good woman.

The men in it were coarse and sensual, yet wittily wicked as a Stuart courtier; the women were loathsome to her, yet quick of repartee and stinging jibe. There were pretty dresses and dainty dances and glowing groups, but as Naomi looked on she felt her faith in humanity wane and weaken in the poisoned air. Good women were held up to mockery, good men distorted into hypocrites, the shameless liar leapt into fortune and success, the leering dancing-girl wedded a lord and drew the patrician purple over her Cyprian saffron, the grey-haired preacher turned satyr, the stately old dame rallied her daughter's husband on his youthful sins, and the whole world of gaily-dressed mummers joined in a carnival of homage to fraud and uncleanness. And the hand that had written all this, the brain that had conceived it in its radiantly lovely *diablerie*, was the hand and the brain of one "Adolf Carr"

Naomi frowned sadly, and her silver pencil scribbled fierce notes on the margin of her programme.

* * * * * *

In the box opposite sat a man with a keen, saturnine face—a face that had in it all the lines of wisdom and insight and physical beauty, though each delicate curve and angle was thrust askew into evil by a restless selfishness that had stamped itself upon him from head to finger-tips. The piece did not seem to interest him greatly. He lay back in his chair beside a screening curtain and stared at Naomi through his glasses, while the tremors of some subtle emotion flickered across his face. . .

When the curtain fell he went round to the door behind her and tapped gently.

Naomi started from her reverie.

"Come in," she said.

He stepped into the tiny room, a graceful, aristocratic figure enough in his evening dress.

"Pardon me," he began slowly, "but I thought I recognised——"

She looked gravely into his face for a second, and then held out her hand.

He took it, and she felt his fingers quiver as they touched hers.

"You have altered greatly," she remarked, speaking as slowly as he had done.

His face troubled her. She had cared for him, and she felt that he had not improved. The intuition grieved her.

"Life has not been too sweet in my mouth," he replied.

She seemed to him like a summer wind blowing through some over-heated, over-scented atmosphere. An hour before he had fancied himself a favourite of Fortune, now all his pleasure had turned to bitterness at the sight of her.

"Then you have not been successful, after all?" she said

She could not for her life have helped the virtual taunt.

He weighed the word "success" in his mind.

"No," he conceded sombrely, "I have not been successful—after all."

She looked at him. The lines of his face seemed to have changed for the better.

"You have been happy?" His eye fell on

her dress, and travelled meaningly to the plush walls around them.

"Yes." She made the admission naturally enough.

"You are married?"

"No," she said simply, "I shall never marry. I earn my living by my pen."

A look of intellectual admiration came into his face.

"You always were a clever girl," he murmured thoughtfully.

She smiled at him, half-amused, half-saddened by her recollection of their parting.

"What do you think of this piece?" she asked, with a motion of her programme towards the stage.

"I—I hardly know," he stammered. "How do you like it?"

"It is a deadly insult to all women everywhere." She answered him with her brows knit in stern condemnation. "Do you not think so?"

"There is the curtain," he said.

The stage-manager was signalling to the

conductor from the wing, and the gleam of the limelight at left and right showed upon the emblazoned canvas.

He turned to her abruptly.

"I wouldn't stop to this act," he faltered. "I—I have seen it before; it isn't nice."

"I must see it through," she decided steadfastly, but with a sudden womanly flush.

He laid his hand on the door.

"Don't go," she urged, "unless you have friends here."

"No," he told her, "I am quite alone here and in the world."

"Then stay," and she drew in her gown.

He stepped to the front of the box and sat down. The curtain rose and the second act commenced.

It was a trying ordeal for Naomi. Her purity revolted from the unpleasant situations and the hideous jargon of the piece, and her whole being was outraged by the cynical, almost devilish, atmosphere in which the play moved. At last a scantily-attired woman came down to the footlights and began to

sing a song. There was a haunting chorus to it, and the "house," catching the infection, was soon alive with the refrain, hummed unconsciously by two thousand people. Both song and chorus brought the red blood to the cheeks and ears of Naomi Clifford.

She rose abruptly and turned to the man at her side.

"Take me away," she shuddered, putting her hands to her face.

As he pushed back his chair the door opened, and a man in evening dress entered.

"Ah! Carr," he observed, bowing to Naomi, who resumed her seat, "I thought you were alone. They said this was your box. They want you behind. Polly North swears that she's got a bit of business that'll fetch them like one man if you'll let her try it."

"I—I am engaged," protested the other, with pale lips.

Naomi looked at them both; a wild surmise in her reeling brain. She raised the programme to her dazed eyes.

"*Adolf Carr!*"

That was the author's name. She crumpled the programme with a convulsive gesture of disgust, and tossed it over the parapet.

"I—I'll come now, Bartley," said 'Adolf Carr.' "I —— Good-night, Miss ——"

But Naomi sat gazing at the stage, while the house rippled with the daintily shameless chorus, and the dancing-girl posed in the lascivious glare of the limelight.

"Good-night, Miss ——"

There was no answer.

And "Adolf Carr" opened the box-door, and stepped out . . . into hell.

PAN AND A "COMMERCIAL"

"SEEST THOU A MAN DILIGENT IN HIS BUSINESS?"

Holy Writ.

PAN AND A "COMMERCIAL."

A YOUNG man stood where the high-road bade farewell to the dust and roar of the city, and started out through a flanking suburb for the few-miles-distant country. He was very primly dressed; his trousers had straight creases down the seams, and were therefore new; he wore a shiny silk hat, light kid gloves, and a red-and-black tie. In one hand he carried an umbrella; in the other a small brown bag. The bag had bright nickel hasps on the top, and there were initials painted upon its side.

The young man had just emerged from a diminutive shop that stood on the corner, well back from the road as it swept round to get clear of the town, and he was pondering irresolutely in the sunshine. This was what he had been saying in the dark little place to the sleepy proprietor:—

"Allow me to introduce to you, sir, the 'Carmen' soap. It is an entirely new scented article, which we have placed on the market, and are advertising extensively. We have brought it, I may say, sir, under the notice of many well-known people, who all speak favourably of it, and we anticipate a very large sale. May I enter you a sample lot, sir, as an experiment? I shall be very happy to supply you with window-bills, show-cards, and everything necessary to its effective display."

And much more to the same effect, all of which had had not the slightest result in the way of business. This was the twentieth call the young commercial traveller had made on the road that ran from ——borough to the far-off blue sea, and ill-luck had dogged him all the way. He looked at his empty order-book, and his heart grew heavy. Finally he was roused from his meditation by the approaching clamour of a 'bus, flaring green of hue, and charioted by a nodding driver in a red coat. "I'll go and

see Wilkinson," decided the Commercial, as the harmony of red and green rumbled discordantly past him, and he jumped in. Wilkinson was the reigning merchant in the archaic fishing and farming centre—half village, half hamlet—towards which the high-road went.

The 'bus rattled and swayed in a confusingly somnolent fashion, and soon the Commercial was sound asleep. No one else was in the 'bus, and the ancient conductor had not the heart to wake him for his fare.

"Business is no great shakes, I reckon," he muttered wisely to himself, having taken the fares of the commercial brotherhood for twenty years or more, and so being *au fait* with the signs of the mercantile times.

Outside, the sun climbed up to the zenith, slipped stealthily athwart, and, lo! it was afternoon. Yet still the Commercial slumbered, as peacefully as a child. The 'bus ground heavily along, between scattered shops and houses, over a stretch of smooth macadam—shaded by the arms of trees that grew in bordering meadows—and came

at length to a drinking-trough which stood beneath a giant oak where four quiet ways met in a dusty star. Here the horses stopped, and the clatter and jangle ended so abruptly that the silence woke up the sleeping Commercial.

"Great Scott!" he said, looking round, "where am I?"

The conductor stared.

"I' Batley Lane," he answered; "mile an' a 'arf past Foy Village."

The Commercial swore a transcendental oath, and consulted his watch.

"I was going to Foy," he explained irritably, for he had just noticed that he had been sleeping with his legs crossed, and had forgotten to loosen his grey trousers over his knees, so that probably they would be "bagged."

"Beg pardon," replied the conductor, "but I couldn't find it i' my 'eart to wake ye, thinkin' ye were goin' to Batley Steading. Ye looked main tired, sir, and slept like an unweaned babe."

Then the Commercial sighed, for he thought

of the empty order-book, and remembered why he had been so tired.

He got up, paid his fare, and stepped into Batley Lane.

"'Bus comes over from Batley 'Arbour be 'arf-past one," volunteered the conductor, pointing down the road that severed their own. With this curt solution of the difficulty and an apologetic nod, he kicked ferociously on the footboard, and the castanet *obligato* began again as the rickety vehicle proceeded on its way.

Left to himself, the Commercial lounged under the spreading oak, straining his eyes for the Batley Harbour 'bus, and profaning the gracious beauty of the early afternoon by many heated observations. At last the stillness—broken only by the occasional questioning note of a bird and the tremor of the oak-tree's boughs—soothed him into sympathy with the placid drowsiness of the place, and he strolled up and down, losing by degrees his petulant anxiety for the arrival of the Batley Harbour 'bus. Longer and longer

grew the beat he had marked out for himself, until he managed to wander down the narrowest of the roads that spread out from the oak and the drinking-trough. Further and further he went, thoughtless of the 'bus for which he should be watching, till he came to a bridge that spanned a shallow rivulet, where a turn in the way hid the cross-roads from sight.

The bridge was two rough slabs of stone laid with their join in the line of the road, and guarded by a slip of stonework built up on each side. Below, the stream babbled over the pebbles beneath the willows, and around, the oak and birch and alder stood up amid the dwarf brushwood and luxuriant fern. The Commercial leaned upon the parapet and gazed dreamily into the romantic glen through which the streamlet flowed. Gradually there came over him an absurd desire to get down into it. He laughed to himself, and remarked, in an off-hand fashion, that it would be a nice place for a picnic. But as he spoke he knew that at that moment he only wanted one

thing on earth seriously, and that was to get down into Batley Wood. So, furtively glancing about him and perceiving no one, he clambered over the wall, slid down an approach of ferns and moss, and stood gazing apprehensively up at the road. Suddenly there grew on the air the *jolt-jolt* of a farmer's cart and the whistling of the waggoner. As he heard it, shame seized upon the luckless Commercial, and he fled along the edge of the stream. Some half-score of yards further on, it turned sharply, the road disappeared from view, and the Commercial, breathing heavily, flung himself and his bag down on the yielding sward and glanced about him.

On all sides he was shut in by foliage. Across the stream the ground rose steeply, set thick with drooping willows, and guarded beyond by a dense plantation. Behind him a gentle slope ran up to the rim of the hollow, over which the sunlight streamed in golden shafts of light. Huge old trees were all around, and the soft turf beneath was sown

with a galaxy of glistening buttercups. In the shady hollows of the bank, by which the rivulet loitered, "birds'-eyes" and "forget-me-nots" nestled, lilies swam in tranquil eddies, and "meadow-sweet" stooped to look at its lace-like tangle in the stream. Birds called to each other across the tiny vale, the water sang through the flagroot and the lily-stems, and every green thing spoke with the air as it swayed on its stalk.

A strange feeling came over the Commercial, and he took off his hat, placing it, crown downwards, on his leather bag. Then he rolled over on to his elbows, and studied the grass and the flowers with his face in his hands. How delicately fresh and cool they looked!—he thought, and laid his cheek to the ground in a childishly affectionate gesture. How richly the meadow-sweet smelled, and how lovingly the water whispered across the shallows! The tears of an unreasoning tenderness rose to the Commercial's eyes. He brushed them from his lashes with an earth-stained forefinger, but they came back

again. A blackbird called unexpectedly from the coppice behind and ceased. There was a throb of silence, and then the voices of the stream and the trees and the grasses murmured musically. The clear gay note, the sob of stillness, and the *concerto* of earth and air and water—it is the most pathetic movement in Nature's symphony, and when it fell on the Commercial's ears, he laid his head upon his arms and cried from sheer happiness and wonder. The great god Pan, who reigns over sky and sea, mountain and wood, dell and valley, save where man has desecrated them, had found this votary of his rival Mammon, strayed haplessly into his leafy kingdom, and had made of him a captive and a worshipper.

* * * * * *

The conductor of the six-o'clock 'bus from Batley Steading pulled up at the cross-roads to take a passenger. He was a young man, with a silk hat, a red-and-black tie, and a leather bag. In one hand he carried an

immense bunch of wild flowers. Bits of moss and fern clung to his fawn overcoat and to his crumpled trousers. From his button-hole projected the fragile horn-like petals of a head of honeysuckle. He sat down in the noisy vehicle, and in the subdued light of the early evening his face looked like a boy's.

"This be main queer," said the conductor, as he surveyed the uncommercial appearance of his spruce morning passenger.

> "Buttercups and daisies,
> O, the pretty flowers,
> Swinging in the sunshine
> Through the summer hours,"

sang the Commercial softly.

"This be *dratted* queer," said the conductor of the Batley Steading 'bus.

THE PAIN OF THE DUVALS

"WHY IS LIGHT GIVEN TO A MAN WHOSE WAY IS HID?"

Job of Uz.

THE PAIN OF THE DUVALS.

PART I.

UPON that isolated range of the Himalayas which thrusts apart the nearing streams of the Beas and the Sutlej, where they pass through the Eastern Punjaub on their way to the Indus, there is an ancient temple. Hewn in the rock it is, with great primeval jötuns supporting the mighty lintel of the narrow doorway. Inside there is one large hall and a few cramped chambers. A wide altar at the feet of a hideous stone idol occupies the position of honour in the temple—an altar on which there are the marks of fierce fires. And on the stone skirts of the statuesque deity, and on the carved roof and walls, there are the same marks of devouring flame. The brushwood has grown about the bases of the

strangely-hewn pillars between which the giant lintel, with its colossal cornice-work, threatens to slide; wild vines wreathe themselves among the brushwood, and the daylight can scarcely dart a stealthy ray into the gloom to search out the mystic idol with its eyes of emerald. It is a hundred years since the foot of a man trod the temple floor, and his bones lie there gaunt and bare, gleaming white in the chance sunbeams that slip between the mass of dangling creepers at the temple door. Upon the spoon-shaped surface of the stone altar there are a few scraps of charcoal, and a human finger-joint with blackened rings.

* * * * * *

A hundred years ago Felix Duval toiled up the Vitraryi spurs of the Himalayas, and came in the gathering evening upon a little mountain village and the temple of Cheshub Char the priest. The villagers themselves drove him away in barbaric terror, hardly sparing his life. But Cheshub

Char, being a wise man, and having heard somewhat of the gunpowder of the Feringhees, gave Felix Duval food, sheltered him in a dark, rock-hewn cell of the temple of the god Vitraryi—whom men no more worship—and asked him for the latest news. Felix Duval, being also a wise man, told all there was to tell—or rather as much as he listed—without fear, and smoked his silver opium-pipe for many nights beside the glowing fire that looked out over the confluence of the Beas and the Sutlej across the distant plains of the Indus. It was a quiet place, and Cheshub Char was a phi'osophical old ecclesiastic, with a *soupçon* of the cosmopolitan about his polished good breeding. So Felix Duval stayed on.

There was another reason in addition to these undoubtedly valid ones. That reason was Mula, the last of the priestesses of Vitraryi. She was a magnificent study for either artist or novelist, and Felix Duval was both a painter and a student of humanity. Where Cheshub Char had discovered this, the

last of the vestal maidens who should serve Vitraryi in his temple, was no one's business but his own. Certainly he gave no encouragement to Felix Duval to pursue his questions. She was not a villager, for they were yellow-skinned, with short lank tresses, and she was brown—brown as a coffee-berry—with long hair like the raven's wing for colour and gloss. Tall and strong she was, with broad hips and lissom muscles. She carried the wood whereon Cheshub Char burnt the pungent incense at sunrise and moonset, she tilled the soil in Cheshub Char's small strip of garden ground, and she knew all the hidden wisdom of the priests of Vitraryi. Felix Duval watched her with interest, and stayed on day after day talking philosophy to Cheshub Char, and clambering over the Himalayas after wild-goat with Mula the priestess. Many wild-goat did Felix Duval slay, yet he did Mula no harm, being a gentleman, and, after his own fashion, a Christian. But Mula's heart went out to him—the passionate Oriental heart of Mula, servant and hand-

maiden of the god Vitraryi, whom men cease to worship. . . .

The time came when Felix Duval must go back to the plains and civilization, and the hearts of Cheshub Char the priest and of Mula the priestess were heavy. Nor did Felix Duval speak much as they sat about the fire that glowed on the rocky plateau in front of the temple, spelling the Divine protection to the village below.

At last Cheshub Char stirred from a trance-like reverie.

"Thou hast sojourned with us many days, Sahib Duval," he said gently.

Duval lit his silver pipe at the embers, and answered courteously.

"We have spoken pleasantly together," added the old man, tremulously, "yet thou hast never told me why thou wanderest on these mountains, far from home and kindred."

Duval lifted his head half-sternly, as if to command silence.

"Nay, let me speak," desired Cheshub Char the priest, and went on. "Nevertheless, I know. Be not surprised; have I not said that I have the hidden wisdom of the priests of Vitraryi? Let me tell on, and say thou if I err in aught. . . . It is many years—the years of ten generations—since the thing happened to thy race. One of thy people, Sahib Duval, broke a woman's heart for lust of wealth and power. He loved her, and he brake the neck of his love across the knees of his ambition, and wedded a great woman who had gold. And she whom he had despised cursed him and his line for ever, that they might love and not wed their love, through all the centuries until the race should pass. And, fearing almost to speak with a woman, thou hast wandered in many lands from thy youth, lest the bitterness of futile love should come upon thee. But it is the doom of thy race, Sahib Duval, and at last it has fallen."

Cheshub Char ceased.

Duval trifled with his pipe awhile, and then replied gravely.

"Thou hast spoken the truth, Cheshub Char, whatsoever revealed it to thee. Go on."

"Nay," confessed Cheshub Char, "I can spell no more, the rest is too near. If men could read the secrets of the Present and the just-departed Past the gods were powerless. But thou lovest, and the curse holds. Is she whom thou desirest wed already?"

By the flash of the firelight on the silver opium-pipe Cheshub Char saw that the Sahib Duval shook his head. In the shadow Mula the priestess drew nearer to Cheshub Char and laid her hand on his. There was silence for a moment, save that the fire snapped noisily at the dry wood.

"No," returned Duval at length, speaking as out of a dream. "She has given herself to Heaven, and it is not lawful to seek to wed her."

Mula raised her hand to Cheshub Char's lips, while Duval lay and dreamed of a pale-faced nun in Abbey Walford by the English Channel, who was more to him than Life and

Death and Immortality. But Mula thought of the rambles after wild-goat, and of kind glances from the Sahib's eyes, and nursed at her vestal heart a human love.

Cheshub Char put up his thin hand and took away Mula's fingers with a pain at his own heart, for he, too, thought of the rambles after wild-goat, and he loved Mula. Yet he loved Vitraryi the god more.

"It is not permitted," he agreed sadly, "to espouse one that is dedicate: thou must bear thy sorrow, Sahib Duval."

Mula crouched down and wept noiselessly. The firelight danced on her glossy black tresses in sparkles like sombre laughter.

"But I can give thee Forgetfulness," said Cheshub Char the priest He drew out a tiny package from under his robe, and opened it. It held a curious ring, with a flat gold signet stamp, very thick, and apparently solid He gave the bezel a twist, and unscrewed it slowly. It took a long time, having a thread as delicately fine as a woman's hair. He lifted the unscrewed signet, and held the ring to

the fire. At the bottom of the socket was a pinch of white powder.

Cheshub Char screwed the bezel into its place.

"Put that into wine," he explained; "drink it, and there will be no more heartache. As for the ring, keep it in memory of—" (he paused, and laid his hand on Mula's head)— "of me," he ended, and leaning across the fire slipped the ring on to Duval's finger.

Duval laughed sadly. The whole occurrence seemed so strange and so unreal, and the pain at his heart was so acute. Two years ago, after twenty spent in foreign travel, he had returned home to fall in love with a woman at first sight, only to find that she was on the point of taking the veil. Six months after he met her she was lost to him for ever behind the walls of the Bernardine Convent. What were the old man's drugs to him? Nothing but a pistol-bullet or a knife-thrust could end his heartache.

He turned the ring thoughtfully on his finger and looked at Mula crouched in the firelight.

"Mula," he said tenderly, "Mula of Vitraryi —thou art a woman: shall I take the powder of Cheshub Char the priest, and forget? Or shall I keep the memory that is in my heart—bitter-sweet though it be?"

"Yes, yes," she cried, "do not forget, do not forget. One can bear to be parted—forever. But to be forgotten—it is worse than death—even the death by the fire of Vitraryi."

Duval wondered somewhat at her eagerness, but he bent his head.

"I will not forget, oh, Mula, Priestess of Vitraryi," he said. . . . .

That night Mula crept to where Duval lay sleeping in the cell which had been his bedchamber for so many days, and stole the ring from his finger. Then she glided through the familiar passages of the temple to the room where Cheshub Char the priest slumbered uneasily, and tossing the contents of the hollow bezel on to the floor, refilled it with a powder which she took from one of the small tips of the horns of the wild-goat—the

improvised repositories of Cheshub Char's drugs.

"He loves me, he loves me," she told herself, "and if ever he wishes to forget he shall taste Death instead."

The old priest turned in his sleep and sighed.

Mula stood motionless for a moment, and then slipped past the couch of skins where the servant of Vitraryi tossed restlessly, and passed out across the temple hall. The moonbeams fell on Vitraryi's emerald eyes, and she shuddered at their glassy hate.

"The god is angry," she whispered in fear. . . .

Kneeling by the bedside of Felix Duval, Mula slipped the ring back upon his finger and kissed his hand.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive me," she murmured, "but I could not bear to be forgotten."

Duval stirred uneasily, and she vanished in the darkness. . . . .

When Cheshub Char arose, just before

the dawn, to offer the morning incense to Vitraryi, Felix Duval was gone, and Mula lay at the feet of the god, weeping like a child.

When Cheshub Char saw her, his face whitened in that look of pitiless determination which marks the priest. He drew his knife and strode across to her, his decrepit frame quivering with a sudden strength.

Mula felt his savage grip upon her shoulder. Stifling a sob she rose on her knees, turning her eyes up to him with the great drops hanging on their lashes.

"Thou art no more a servant of the Lord of Heaven," he hissed between his teeth: "thou hast profaned His temple."

"*I?*"

She gazed at him with frightened, innocent eyes.

"Ay"—his fixed stare seemed to read her soul—"where wert thou last night?"

Her dark skin flushed a deeper tint as she read his meaning. Then she plucked out a little dagger and turned on him.

"You lie, Cheshub Char," she said scornfully,

"I am a vestal of the god Vitraryi, and—I—I——"

She stopped, terrified by his gaze.

"Where wert thou last night?" he asked steadily.

Mula's mind ran over its crowded events. In thought again she stole the ring; in thought again she stood by Cheshub Char's coffers, changing the powder which should give Forgetfulness for that which would bring Death; in thought again she crossed the temple and saw the green eyes of the god gleam snake-like in the moonbeams; in thought again she wept over the hand of Felix Duval as he lay sleeping in the darkness; in thought again she fled at a chance motion of his unconsciousness; in thought again she watched him go down over the edge of the plateau into the still midnight.

She looked up at Cheshub Char and smiled proudly.

"I understand," she said, "yet art thou a foolish old man. Nevertheless, I am ready."

She dropped on her knees and bent her head. . . . . .

When the morning incense went up to Vitraryi there went up also the smoke of sacrifice—a long black trail of sombre cloud that oozed out of the temple doorway and drifted away to the village beneath. And that is why there are the marks of fierce fire upon the stone skirts of the god, and upon the carved walls of his temple where it stands on that distant spur of the Himalayas

But Felix Duval went down to the plains of Indus, wearing the signet-ring with the hollow bezel.

PART II.

THE last of the Duvals stood by the great windows that opened on to the wide lawn of Abbey Walford. He held a ring in his

fingers—a signet-ring of heavy gold, with an awkward bezel of the same metal. And just as a hundred years ago, upon the slopes of the Himalayas, the shrunken fingers of Cheshub Char the priest had laid bare the tiny pinch of white powder which lay behind the carved Sanscrit characters, so to-day, looking out upon a goodly heritage that smiled in the August sun, Stephen Duval's brown hands unscrewed the bit of moveable metal, and his blue eyes gazed curiously at the mysterious anodyne.

He was twenty-one, the last of the Duvals, this gay August day, and in accordance with the Duval custom, the keys of a certain cabinet had been given to him, as from time immemorial they had been given to the heir of the house. That cabinet contained the story of the Duval curse, written in faded ink upon an antique parchment. Side by side with it had lain for a hundred years the signet-ring of Cheshub Char the priest, and set down in Felix Duval's firm hand, the history of its coming to him. At the foot of

this latter document were written some two or three sentences of various dates, but all of similar purport. "To lose is better than to forget.—Walford Duval, 1801." "The curse fell lightly on me; she died in my arms.—Horace Duval, 1850." And scrawled in the scant space left by these—"'When I forget thee may my right hand forget her cunning.'—Julian Duval, 1878."

None of the Duvals who had gone before had chosen to drink of the waters of Lethe which drug the memory, and to-day the ring, with its puissant contents, lay in the hands of the last of the race, passively awaiting his decision, as it had awaited that of four generations.

Stephen stood looking at the pinch of powder in whose potency his ancestors had so blindly believed. His nineteenth-century scepticism half inclined him to laugh—half tempted him to swallow the uncanny stuff and see what would happen. But the circumstances of reality which surrounded the matter—the withered parchment, the sheets

of thin foreign paper on which Felix Duval had written the account of his meeting with Cheshub Char, the priest, the ponderous ring with its inscribed bezel, and above all, a vague European awe of the occult East—these bred a lurking faith in the efficacy of the drug and in the truth of the fantastic narrative. He screwed up the ring again and slipped it on to his finger with a puzzled sigh. Perhaps there was something in it; he would study it out another time. He caught up his riding-whip and gloves, and leaving the papers lying on the flap of the open cabinet strode out through the French window.

* * * * * *

Ellie was not a Duval. She was too slight and small for much of their blood to run in her veins; the Duvals were all tall and strong of limb. Then, too, the Duval eyes were blue—sky-blue, and the Duval hair was fair. Ellie's eyes were grey—the grey of a wind-blown cloud—and her hair was just the tint one sees on a hazel-nut in its deeper shades,

only it had a caressing golden gloss on it like sunshine falling upon brown leaves in autumn. Ellie had a fancy for pretty dresses, and took her path through life a dainty figure in quaintly-cut gowns of tender hues—greys and faint greens, and all the temperate tints that make up the glory of the opal. Ellie was rather like an opal. Her face was delicate, her features fine though not sharp, her ways quiet yet erratic, her habits bird-like and shy. She was cousin and foster-sister to the last of the Duvals. They had grown up together—so far, that is, as Ellie had grown up—the hot-tempered, passionate boy with the heart of a poet, and this grave, shy little maid with her mouse-like ways, her observant glances, and her womanly carriage All his moods and whims—a thousand and one, and ever-varying—were known to her, with their suitable accompaniment of commiseration or laughter, talk or silence; his hopes and ambitions were hers also, and she followed him in his studies with a brain, if less talented, more assiduous than his own. Her

tender *rapport* with his highly-strung nature was hidden from his masculine perceptions by her mature self-possession ; but there was not an action of his that she did not trace with a cool astuteness entirely her own—not a thought that she did not fathom with an almost supernatural mixture of insight and deduction. Stephen the lad rebelled at her ceaseless ministry of care and sympathy; Stephen the youth came to appreciate it, to look for it, and then—man-like!—to grumble if she relaxed the perfection of her servitude. A tremulous hope unfolded in Ellie's heart. Alas for Ellie!—the last of the Duvals was a poet, and could not dream of loving in so sane and wise a fashion.

Finally Hope Grenville, the orphan daughter of the late Sir Richard Grenville, of Walford Hall, came to her adjacent country-seat, fresh from the triumphs of her first season. She had a rich dark beauty, the beauty which matches well with crimson—the beauty which has just a suggestion of the Delilah-esque, the heartless, the mocking, in its velvety

softness. At her tiny feet Stephen flung his heart with all a young poet's rash impetuosity, and with all a young poet's cruel stupidity he made a *confidante* of the little cousin Ellie. Ellie bore the pain bravely, and tried to be sad when Stephen told of rebuff and scorn—tried to be sad for his dear sake, and only succeeded in being less happy for her own.

She started up this morning from among the ferns, a book in hand, as he cantered down the avenue of beeches that were the pride of Abbey Walford. The roan cob pulled up by force of habit at the sight of her, and Stephen frowned. He was on his way to Walford Hall, and in a hurry.

Ellie would have scorned to hasten—under observation. She stepped demurely through the undergrowth, drawing her gown free of the detaining grasses. The last of the Duvals lifted his cap, and the roan gave a joyous snort by way of greeting.

Stephen bent down from his saddle, and touched the firm fingers.

"Good morning, Ellie," he said rapidly.

"Good morning, Stephen," answered the little cousin; "give my love to Hope."

Stephen started and then laughed.

"Witch," he cried, "how did you know where I was going?"

Ellie stroked the cob's nose.

"My dear Stephen," she protested, "where are you *always* going? Go on, little horsie, your master has no time to talk to Cousin Ellie."

Stephen snatched her hand.

"Oh, yes, Ellie, I have," he said, remorsefully. "I'll get down and walk a bit of the way."

"No, no, Stephen," she demurred laughingly, "go and make love, I'll stay and read philosophy."

She held up her book. The next moment it fell lightly on Zampa's brown flank. The roan started off at a gallop, while the laughter of the little cousin rang out like the chime of fairy bells.

Stephen turned in his saddle at the corner

of the drive, and saw her standing in the changeful flicker of the sunshine that fell through the branches, a small figure in a pearl-grey gown with a knot of yellow moon-daisies at her belt.

* * * * * *

Ellie stood by the cabinet which Stephen in his careless fashion, had left unlocked.

Ellie had no conscience worth speaking of where Stephen was concerned, and she was mistress at last of the Duval secret. So Stephen could never marry the woman he loved. That was Hope Grenville. Then there was a chance for—other people, she thought, in her evasive fashion. If he would only swallow this strange powder in the ring of which Felix Duval's letter told her! That must be the new ring she had noticed this morning on one of the fingers that grasped Zampa's rein.

Ellie was so deep in thought that she did not notice Stephen's entrance. He was used to her habit of reading his papers, and, with

a casual glance at her occupation, flung himself into a lounge. Startled by the sound of the yielding springs, she turned. At the sight of his face her heart sank. It was flushed, and wore an air of triumph.

Ellie laughed—a characteristic ripple of merriment.

"Success?" she asked.

Stephen smiled reflectively.

"No," he said, "not actual success, but she was very good to me."

"*H'm*," remarked Ellie wisely, and with a sense of relief, "she's been that before."

"Not like this." Stephen's mouth softened at the recollection of Hope Grenville's face as it had smiled on him half-an-hour ago.

Ellie stood leaning on the cabinet.

"You think you've won?" she inquired quizzically.

"No, I don't," said Stephen, "but I'll know to-night."

"How?" demanded Ellie, a throb of surprise paining her wrists.

Stephen took off the ring of Cheshub Char, and held it up.

"She has asked me to dine with her to-night—'Just we two,' she said, Ellie, so prettily—and I shall tell her what this powder in the ring means, and ask her if I am to drink it. If she says 'No,' then I shall be sure."

"Of what?" pursued Ellie.

"That she loves me," explained Stephen.

Ellie laughed.

"Don't be *too* sure," she warned him, and laughed again at his puzzled look.

"Very well," he answered, sobered into a momentary gloom by her words; "you shall see. She wants you to come over in the evening, if you will, to sing."

Ellie frowned. She could not help it.

"You will come, Ellie?" he said beseechingly, surprised at the expression of her face.

The little cousin nodded.

"She—she would be disappointed if you didn't," he added, relieved.

Ellie looked meditatively at her boot-toe. Then she glanced up and laughed once more.

"Oh, I'll come," she replied, and then, as

she went down the corridor and across the hall, she wondered to herself at Stephen's last remark, and thought, "Men are very clumsy."

* * * * * *

Stephen sat over a *tête-à-tête* dessert with Hope Grenville. The candles glowed under their Japanese shades, throwing wide haloes of tinted glory upon the damask and silver. The servants had withdrawn, and Stephen was—or should have been—enjoying himself. But the words of the little cousin rang in his ear—"Don't be *too* sure—don't be *too* sure." What could Ellie have meant? Of course, if Hope said, "Do not drink it," it would be because——

He set down the peach he was playing with, and took the ring from his finger. Hope, sitting behind the coffee-service, noticed the action, and spoke languidly.

"What a curious ring, Mr. Duval! Has it a history?"

For answer Stephen told her the story of

Felix Duval. Only he said nothing of the Duval curse—it gave him a shudder as he thought of it.

When he had finished he drew up one of the candles, poured out a glass of champagne, and began to unscrew the carven bezel. It took some time, and occasionally he looked up, half-amused, to meet Hope's laughingly-interested glance. When the detached bit of metal lay finally in his palm, he held out the ring to show her the powder lying at the bottom of the socket.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, regarding him with her bright eyes, in which there seemed always a flicker of slumbering mockery.

For answer he shook the powder into the champagne-glass, and held it to the light. It lay inert at the bottom of the crystal hemisphere. Then one of the beads of air that rose up the hollow stem took on a shimmer of green, another a crimson lustre, and the glass seemed filled with a shattered rainbow. Suddenly there was a flush of

sunset-pink in the glass, a flush that grew deeper and deeper until it looked like blood, and glittered with the sullen fire of the ruby. Then the fluid paled slowly until it passed through a silvery grey into a brilliant emerald, transparent, light-reflecting. And so it stayed.

Stephen leant forward and touched Hope's hand.

"Hope," he murmured huskily, "I have loved you ever since I first saw you. . . ."

* * * * * *

The little cousin stood outside the French windows and gazed in at the two through the apertures of the Venetian blind. With her cloak gathered about her she had watched the mysterious transformation that the powder had effected in the bubbling champagne, and she strained her eyes with fierce eagerness when Stephen bent caressingly, as she could guess, to ask the fatal question.

She could not hear what was said, but she saw that Hope's white fingers lay unresistingly

beneath Stephen's brown ones for what seemed to her whole æons of time. At last Stephen lifted the glass, with its strangely-coloured contents, and put it gently into Hope's hand.

He held out his own, and Ellie knew that he was asking the proud beauty whom he loved, if, in womanly mercy, she must give him forgetfulness.

Ellie held her breath, while Hope looked, with all a wanton's enjoyment of the situation, at the ardent young face before her. But the white fingers set down the glass, the dark eyes looked kindly into the blue ones, and Stephen bowed his head to hide the tears of thankfulness. The little cousin shivered under her cloak, and her heart seemed to die within her. . . . .

She drew the hasp of the French window, and stepped into the dining-room.

The two had strolled out into the conservatory—the last of the Duvals with his turbulent poet-heart, and the dark-eyed coquette who had chosen in a moment and

for a moment to be gracious—and the glow of the lamps fell upon a deserted room. It was cool for August, and a small wood-fire flickered in the open grate.

Ellie crossed the floor wearily, and sat down in a big "sleepy-hollow" chair, drawing up the hem of her gown to warm her tiny toes. She was trembling like a leaf, and it took a good ten minutes in front of the cosy blaze to restore her the command of her usually iron nerves. When she had regained her self-possession she rose, went to the table, and took up the champagne-glass into which Stephen had tossed the contents of Cheshub Char's ring—the powder of Death with which—a hundred years before—Mula, priestess of Vitraryi, had displaced that destined only to give surcease of futile love.

"*I* must forget you now, Stephen," she said, with a tearless sob. "I—I must not think of you any more; you are not mine, but Hope's. Good-bye, Stephen, my love, my love."

She emptied the glass with a trembling

hand that shook a few emerald drops on to the lace about her bosom, and then sat down, plucking a black grape from the twig left on Stephen's plate, "to take the taste out of her mouth."

Before she could raise it to her lips she was dead.

* * * * * *

Stephen and Hope were pacing the warm conservatory with the moonbeams shining down upon them across the great fans of the palms. The fluent Duval lips were pouring out a passionate flood of lover's talk, and the pink ear of the coquette at his side thrilled with pleasure. She had never been wooed like this before—not even by him to whom she had given——

Her thoughts and his monologue were interrupted by a visitor, who rose up in the scented dusk, and clasped Hope in his arms as she started back in affright.

"They said you were here," remarked the stranger, with a glance at Stephen, "but, I understood, alone."

"Oh," said Hope, the mocking glimmer scintillating in her eyes, "this is Mr. Duval. His cousin Ellie and I are bosom friends. Mr. Duval, this is Captain Hatfield, my husband. As you are such an intimate acquaintance, I think you may know. We were privately married in London six months ago, before the Captain went abroad." . . .

Stephen bowed, then turned and walked steadily through the long, palm-fringed aisle under the moonbeams to the dining-room, pleasant in its yellow light. He strode up to the table and put out his hand to the glass of champagne.

It was empty; in a chair beside it sat the little cousin, her head drooping upon her arms, her cloak fallen from her white shoulders—dead.

AT THE FLAGON INN

"As a madman who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, so is the man that deceiveth . . . and saith: 'Am I not in sport?'"

The Book of Proverbs.

AT THE FLAGON INN.

In the pink flush of an autumn sunset two women turned their horses' heads into the courtyard of the Flagon Inn. One rode a stout grey Belgian, one a slender bay mare. The grey was breathing easily, having cantered just far enough to get his second wind; the bay mare panted convulsively, her distended nostrils showing bright crimson even in the glow from the western sky; the foam-flakes hung on her lips, and blood dropped from cruel spur-wounds in her flank. The Belgian had come down the hill from Becket Priors, a bare three miles, over a good road; the bay had been ridden twenty, at the utmost stretch of her speed and endurance, over rugged moor and clay haulm, straight as the crow flies, from Ley Town, and still at the same dare-devil speed, had raced up a half-mile

stretch of ill-kept highway to the doors of the Flagon Inn.

The two women dismounted with a glance at each other. The rider of the grey was a red-cheeked, dark-eyed young woman in a fiery scarlet cloak. The reckless mistress of the thoroughbred was slight and girlish-looking, with a skin as duskily white as ivory, through which the veins of brow and eyelid showed a tender blue. Her hair, which was bound up in rich masses under her furred hood, was chestnut brown, but her eyes were of the colour of a summer sky. She was closely muffled in a fur riding coat over her green habit, and from the heel of one of her dainty boots projected a ruthless Spanish spur. Her riding-whip had a jewelled head, and when she drew off her glove to loop up her skirt, her diamond rings scintillated in the retreating sunshine.

The patrician was the first to speak. Turning abruptly to the ostler as he slung both reins over his arm, and speaking in a clear and peculiarly distinct voice, she said rather than asked :—

"You had a storm here last night?"

The ostler raised himself on tiptoe, whereby he could just see a strip of sea between the courtyard-arch and the tops of the trees that stood upon the slope which fell away from the other side of the road.

He jerked confirmatorily—a sidelong, angular gesture of the left hip.

"Great foreign ship went on the rocks below," he answered, hitching up the bridles on to his shoulder and patting the bay, "and all her folk were drowned save one——drat it!" he broke off, "here I be wasting my time with the mare in a deadly sweat, and wantin' rubbin' down to once."

"Never mind! never mind!" interrupted the owner of the bay. "One was saved——"

'Ay," went on the ostler, "a most queer soul, a most queer soul."

The woman in the scarlet cloak came hastily within a less equivocal ear-shot.

"Ay, a *most* queer soul," reiterated the ostler, evidently well satisfied with his phrase. "A cavalier very richly dressed, and with much

moneys in the belt about his waist. Yet, look you, stone blind, and with the long curls of him as white as the driven snow."

One of the women threw back her fur-lined coat from her throat, as though it choked her.

The country-girl stepped forward, and laid her hand upon the ostler's arm.

"Was he hurt?" she faltered, with dry lips.

"Ay," admitted the ostler with a sort of relish; "knocked sore against they rocks, was he. Wanders in his head, they say. I helped to carry him in. A fine big soul he was too. They say he may die. Coom up, mare!" And the ostler stepped off amid the clatter of reluctant hoofs.

The two women crossed the courtyard side by side, each absorbed in her own thoughts. As they entered the deep porch of the inn they touched, shoulder to shoulder, and both looked up—blue eyes into brown, a veiled, questioning, antagonistic look.

"A fair good-day, Mistress Jocelyn," said the host of the Flagon cheerily to the scarlet

cloak: "your servant, madam," to the little figure in its furs and jewels. "Does your ladyship desire lodging at the Flagon? There is an excellent apartment with retiring-room and a view of the sea which hath no equal in the country-side. Mistress Leigh, show her ladyship the best chamber. A king hath slept in it before your ladyship, and was pleased to say he had never slept better."

"Look well to the mare," commanded the person addressed, checking the flow of Master Leigh's chatter; "I may want her in the morning betimes." And with this curt instruction, she followed her obsequious guide.

"What brings thee over here, Mistress Jocelyn?"

The innkeeper had recourse to his plebeian visitor.

"My father heard of the wreck and feared it might be the *Olive-branch*, in which he hath a large share," was Mistress Jocelyn's explanation, delivered with hot cheeks and downcast eyes.

"Heaven be thanked, no; only a great foreign ship," Master Leigh remarked patriotically.

"And all on board were drowned?" hazarded Jocelyn, not choosing to betray her information to the contrary.

"Alack! all save one, and he blind, so that, as one might say, he was the least worth saving. Snow-white hair, he hath. Perhaps it was the danger and the fear of yester-night that bleached it, even as one hears. But he cannot tell us, since he wandereth in his head. Come in to some supper and thou shalt know all."

* * * * * *

When next the two women met, the Flagon Inn was shrouded in darkness and silence, save for the sough of the wind at its many casements, and the distant murmur of the sea. In the pitchy darkness of the wide landing one laid a hand on the other's, and each started back in noiseless dismay. But each was convinced that the encounter was imaginary, and so passed on in different directions on the same quest.

The patrician, having a cooler head, a quicker ear, and a shrewder instinct, found her way to their common goal with comparative ease and rapidity. Nevertheless, the peasant, pausing at last to reconnoitre, was hard upon Miladi's unconscious heels. Both had been attracted by the same tentative index—a steady ray of pallid light flung low across the dusky corridor.

The peasant listened vigilantly, but no decided sound broke that endless flow of minute noises which takes the name of silence. The room, by whose closed door she stood, would have seemed empty had it not been for the pencil of luminous yellow dreaming athwart the dark.

She stooped, setting her perspicacity to the test of experiment. No faintest gleam from the awkward key-hole, none from the yawning cracks that traversed the warping panels, only the one stray rod of light thrust from a solitary point of the shallow hiatus at the threshold. Evidently an arras covered the inner surface of the hinged wooden leaf. She

lifted the latch, pushed the door open, and slipped in, hidden by the ancient tapestry.

With cautious fingers she drew aside the hangings.

It was the sick man's chamber—the room of him who had been rescued from the "great foreign ship." As she had hoped, the nurse was asleep by the cavernous fireplace. The closely-draped couch stood in strong shadow. The peasant slipped across and stood behind the heavy curtain. Tenderly as she trod, it shook the rickety floor, and the bed jarred. The sick man moved and sighed. There was a sudden puff of air, as of a forced breath, and the feeble rushlight flickered out as a little figure stepped hurriedly into the same recess behind the curtain.

The nurse awoke and yawned.

"Fine lights they be of Master Leigh's. Buyin' them in Ley Town instead of Beckett's Borough! An' fine draughts there be in this dratted room."

With another yawn she relit, after much labour, the offending rushlight, and relapsed into sleep again.

As the light dominated the gloom the two women looked into each other's eyes in defiant wonder, but neither stirred until the slumberous murmur echoed once more from the fireplace.

Then the patrician, stealthily approaching the peasant's ear, spoke in a scarcely-audible whisper that was like the wraith of speech :—

"Why, in Heaven's name, art *thou* here?"

The country-girl raised her eyebrows, parrying with a scornful query.

"I," returned the patrician—"I came to see *him*."

It was a vocal gesture, and indicated the bed by which they stood.

"And I also," retorted the other, looking without fear into the glittering blue eyes.

"What are you to him?" persisted their owner with a fierce intonation.

The brown eyes flung back the question, no less fiercely.

"I loved him," confessed the aristocratic lips.

The plebeian noticed the form of the sentence, and took her revenge.

"He loved me," she sneered.

"It is false" (the whisper had in it the sound of a threat); "I was to have been his wife."

"Ay!" scoffed the peasant, "and you gave him up because he broke the law and had to fly for his life."

"It is false—my father——"

"Your father!" laughed the other bitterly; '*my* father forbade it, but we met——"

"You are lying," hissed the patrician.

"Lying! Who are you that call me liar? What is your name?"

The blue eyes did not falter before the flash of indignation.

"Clarice," came the reply; "and who are you?"

"Jocelyn," was the curt answer.

The sick man moved and parted his lips.

"My love, my love," he wailed, and then the words became indistinguishable.

Two figures stole involuntarily nearer and leaned over the speaker. He was a

wonderfully handsome man, with curling brown beard and moustache, cut cavalier-fashion, and feminine ringlets of hair, snow-white as though powdered.

The women gazed at him passionately.

"My love, my love," he repeated, stretching out his arms and opening his blind eyes; "Amy!—*my* Amy!"

Peasant and patrician turned and looked at each other.

Lady Clarice laughed noiselessly till her shoulders shook, though her blue eyes shone wet and anguished.

"Nurse," moaned the sick man, in a changed voice—the fretful voice of the sick.

Lady Clarice blew out the rushlight, and the two women departed warily. Upon the lower landing Clarice bent to her companion's ear.

"My love," she murmured, mockingly, "Amy!—*my* Amy!"

And laughing silently, she was gone in the darkness.

* * * * * *

Next morning, in the warm radiance of the early sunlight, two women turned their horses' heads out of the courtyard of the Flagon—one up, one down the hill.

Lady Clarice reined in her bay mare, and leant towards the great grey horse beside her.

"Amy!" she jeered; "*my* Amy!" and rode off laughing.

THE SPOILING OF JIM ROBINSON.

"WOE UNTO YOU WHEN ALL MEN SHALL SPEAK WELL OF YOU."

The Christ.

THE SPOILING OF JIM ROBINSON.

WHEN I was a young man in an office, lingering on the brink of literature and fearing to leave the *terra firma* of my detested clerkship, I knew Jim well. He was a wiry, good-natured little man, of Lancashire birth and Irish speech, who discharged the multiple functions of carter, packer, and warehouseman to a small firm of dealers in dry goods. In his personal capacity he bred canaries, and was a fine judge of a terrier. Somehow his character seemed to me to combine in a quaint fashion the qualities of his feathered and four-footed favourites. Pert, cheery, and active, he was not unlike his own prize "Yorkshire grey" that sang "loike wan av Hiven's own larrks," and which he would sell to no one—not even to me, his *fidus Achates*. Game,

eager, and faithful, he approached, as nearly as unstable human nature can, to the sterling trustworthiness of the trim English terrier. Of him I have written elsewhere that he worked for his employers twelve years, made up his mind to ask for a "roise"; worked another five, petitioned, and was offered sixpence per week by way of advance. It was then that Jim set out to leave, but habit was too strong for him, and he toiled on until Fate, with ulterior purposes and a dry humour, tossed him a legacy of £100 a year. Jim heard the news calmly, gave instant warning, and stepped out of Bakers' dry-goods warehouse, Livingstone Street, to take lodgings in Arcadia Square, Seven Dials, and become a Good Samaritan.

Arcadia Square is off Alexandra Lane, and is a large cobblestone quadrangle, surrounded by stables, warehouses, and the blind sidewalls of a factory or two. There is a single house in it, wherein, at that time, lived in solitary comfort a foreman warehouse-keeper and his wife. With them Jim established

himself. When I heard of his proceeding, I was astonished beyond measure, for I knew that Jim's one desire was to live in the country and pursue his hobbies in its rural quiet. So I went down to see him upon an August evening. Seven Dials was odorous after the heat of the day, and I wondered still more at Jim's choice as I passed through its mazes to Arcadia Square.

Because there are no houses in the Square, save the one which I have mentioned as being occupied by Jim's landlord, the owners and proprietors of the surrounding stables leave their carts and lurries drawn up in its quadrangle for the night, and when I entered the Square, I saw that it was the haunt of the children of the place. Swarming over the vehicles, sliding down the sloping shafts, swinging in tailboard chains, barefoot, ragged, and riotous, they filled the air with the animated discords of their thin treble.

As I rounded the corner into the Square, Jim himself entered it from an opposite direction. Instantly a wild shout went up, and

every child in the precincts of Arcadia Square made a rush for the little man, overwhelming him with demands and information. I stepped back into Alexandra Lane to watch and listen. "Jim," one shrill voice screamed, "Sar' Ann's cut her foot." "An', Jim," chimed in half-a-dozen, still more shrilly, "Mamie Jones has got the fever." "An' they've nothing to eat," broke out another chorus, while from the outskirts of the group came a dropping fire of childish petitions, so loudly proffered that even I, standing round the corner, was nearly deafened.

Jim, however, was perfectly collected, for though I could not hear his voice, I saw that he was dealing rapidly and skilfully with his clamorous suppliants—bandaging the wounded foot, answering questions, settling appeals, effecting reconciliations, and listening to the myriad items of news and gossip that were poured into his ears by the tatterdemalion mob. Finally he dismissed the last of the crowd and departed from the Square. I followed and caught up with him.

"Aha, sorr," he said in his pleasant Irish voice, softened into an English inflection by the influence of the London tongue, "have ye bekim a missionary? They're wanted bad in these parts, sorr."

"No," I told him, "but you have, by all accounts, Jim. Why in the name of Baker Brothers are you living down here?"

Jim fumbled at his neckerchief—he never, on principle, wore a collar—rattled the money in his pocket, spat, took a desperate chew at his quid—for I regret to say that Jim loved "thick twist" not wisely but too well—and observed incoherently—"The childher, sorr, the childher."

"Yes," I returned, "there were about thirty of them I should judge. But I thought you hated children, Jim, being a bachelor like myself."

Jim was abashed at my flippant tone, and pursued shamefacedly, "Me married sister's baby-gurrl, sorr, died the day afther the money kem to me, an' havin' nursed her mostly, Oi sorrowed more than Janie did for the feel of the

child's little body in me arms, and the brush of her golden hair agin me cheek."

Jim untied his red neck-handkerchief, and blew his nose with it.

"An' knowin' these parts, sorr," he went on, "an' that the Square was fair swarmin' wid childher, Oi kem to lodge wid old Ben Porter, and most of the childer, sorr, Oi am like a father to. Don't ye come wid me, sorr, 'tis the fever Oi'm goin' to," and Jim was gone.

When next I happened to see Jim, it was four months after our encounter in Arcadia Square, and the depth of a bitter winter. He was looking very unlike the Jim Robinson I had known as Baker Brothers' warehouseman. He was poorly dressed, and his boots were shabby. Also there were the dark circles of weariness about his eyes.

"Hullo, Jim," I remarked, "what is the matter with your fortune?"

"For God's sake, sorr," he besought me, "don't jest. 'Tis little enough ut is, wid three weeks' frost, and iv'ry other man in the Lane

out av wurrk. 'Tis cruel harrd on the childher, sorr. Av ye only saw thim, sorr, comin' for their tea and bread on a dark mornin', sorr, over the harrd snow, wid their poor little feet all bare to the pain av ut's cold, ye could not jest, sorr—ye could not jest."

"What on earth are you talking about, Jim?" I demanded, irritated at his censure, and wondering at the idea that was dawning upon me.

"Av ye have toime, sorr, come wid me and see. Ye will be able to advoise me about ut, for 'tis a sore task for an unlearned man like meself."

I went to Arcadia Square in the frost and the snow, and when I had been there an hour I wanted to bow down before Jim Robinson and do him homage. He had taken a vacant stable, and turned it into a Children's Hall, making it bright and cheerful in deft, almost womanly ways. Single-handed he had created it, and single-handed he was carrying it on, giving his bairns—a hundred of them he said there were—a meal each morning,

and beguiling the long, cold, hungry evenings for them with story and song in his warm stable-hall.

"Coals is dear, sorr," he explained, "but they are happier wid a fire at night than if Oi gev them another meal. 'Tis cheaper for me, sorr, too, an' 'tis hard to kape on me feet at toimes wid so many to feed."

"Jim," I said, with a sense of shame, "I must help. You will let me, won't you? I will give——"

"Thank ye, sorr—thank ye, but the childher are me own, and Oi'll maybe manage wid a bit av scrapin'. Thank ye, sorr, 'tis meant kindly, but wid God's help Oi will make shift to feed me own." And nothing I could do would alter his decision.

Early in the succeeding January I left England abruptly for South Africa upon one of the imperious fiats of Mammon, and was away for the best part of a year. Coming down once to Capetown from the interior, I bought a batch of English papers and magazines, but had no opportunity of

reading them for months. When I did manage to attack them, the first article I came upon was one in a well-known monthly, descriptive of "Mr. James Robinson's Arcadia Square Mission." How much the writer had "worked up" his subject, I had, of course, no means of telling, but evidently Jim had prospered in his self-appointed task. His efforts were described in the article as "consecrated" and "self-sacrificing," and his character was indicated to be one of "wonderful tenderness and purity." Reading this on the South African veldt, I sighed and felt anxious about the little man. For Jim had become a philanthropist.

At length chance landed me in London again, and in a lull of my work I made up my mind to seek out Jim and see whether prosperity had continued with him. It was mid-winter, and Seven Dials seemed even more miserable than it usually does at that period of the year, as I drove into its heart in the hansom that had brought me from the Strand.

I got down in Alexandra Lane, and turned into Arcadia Square. My first glance was at Jim's citadel, the stable which his genius had transformed into a Children's Hall. It was fast going to ruin. The windows were shattered, the doors were off their hinges, and the whole place, from the broken padlock-chain below to the faded sign "Arcadia Hall" above, was significant of failure.

I crossed to Ben Porter's house, and found Mrs. Porter at home. When I asked after Jim, the old dame shook her head. "'E's niver done no good," she said decisively, in the blunt accents of Cockaigne, "since them kerridge-folk kime visitin' 'im an' 'e got wrote abart in the pipers. For a while awfter they fust kime 'e kep on at 'is wuk wi' the kids, thow 'e would go ter the 'ead of the Square an' luk up an' darn the Line, ter see if any kerridges were comin' wi' the swells ter see hover 'is mishing. An' 'e bort orl the pipers ter see if there were anythink abart 'im 'an 'is mishing in 'em. An' in corse, there wer'n't nowt abart

'im at orl, ownly when the toffs in the brow'ms fust kime an' 'e tuk it t'eart a lot and didn't tike no more interest in the kids. An' then the plice fell ter ruing, sir, in a wye which is shimeful ter see, *I* sye, and so I 'ev told 'im orfn, sying that 'e should 'ev looked awfter it, sir, once 'eving started it. But 'e ownly said I were like the rest on 'em, 'eving no feelin' for self-sacrificin' wuk—them was 'is very words, sir—and went orf ter moon abart the Square and p'r'aps buy a piper ter see if there were anythink abart 'is 'lybers' in it. Folk can't wuk and show themselves rarnd at the sime time, sir, *I* sye. Jim tried it, an' look there."

She pointed to Arcadia Hall.

Sad at heart, I turned away to see Jim crossing the Square. We shook hands silently.

"How is the world using you, Jim?" I asked.

For reply he pointed to the Hall. "There is a noice return for such loving labours as

Oi gave, sorr—don't ye think? Fwhat do they care"—and he waved his hand Westward—"for the self-sacrifice that Oi put into ut, and the sorrow that ut cost me? Fwhat? Fwhat?"

I looked at him gravely, and the angry expression died out of his eyes as they searched mine.

A bare-footed girl, seeing a well-dressed stranger in the Square, ran up and asked for a penny.

"Are you hungry?" I inquired.

"Rather!" she exclaimed ardently.

I gave her the coin, and she trotted off satisfied.

"You have been hungry for fame, Jim," I remarked sadly, "but they have been hungry for the bread that you gave them once, and have forgotten to give them now, only because —because——"

Jim put his face into his hands, and I broke off, thinking I had said enough. When he looked up, his eyes were dry and bright.

"Oi will start ut again," he answered: "Oi will, Oi will."

"It must be soon, then, Jim," I urged, "for it is terrible weather."

Jim leaned forward suddenly till his face touched mine. "Oi will," he said: "we are old friends, ye know, sorr, an'"—his face sharpened with a look of ingratiation that smote me painfully—"an' . . . . ye write for the papers, now, sorr?"

Then I understood that Jim Robinson had passed beyond my redemption.

"A RISING POLITICIAN"

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven."

The Christ.

"A RISING POLITICIAN."

A Dramatic Study.

RIGHT HON. FRANCIS WHITE, M.P. *(an Under-Secretary of State);* HERO *(a little girl).*

ACT I.

"THE MOUTH OF BABES."

Library at "The Chesils," Haslingdean, Sussex.

WHITE (*alone, opening letters*)—Confound my constituents! Do they think I am going to squander all my income on the charitable institutions of Cottonborough because I happen to represent that exceedingly smoky town at St. Stephen's? What the deuce do they think I'm going to live on? (*Yawns,*

and goes on opening letters, grumbling to himself.) Pestering me about St. Cuthbert's Parish Fund in the only week-end I've had for!—(*Stops to read a letter intently.*) H. is getting the party into a nice mess. (*Goes over the letter again, half-audibly.*)

> H. has committed us against F.'s Bill, much to our disgust. But we shall have to grin and bear it. There'll be a nice old row in the country when it gets known, but if we were to back down it would be fatal. On the other hand, if we are beaten on a division it will be just as bad. We rely implicitly on your support. In a few days we shall know the worst.

(*His face grows dark.*) The fools! the fools! They don't know the amount of support F. has in the country. (*More calmly.*) Ah, well! I daresay we'll weather the storm; it's like H. (*Seizing a pen and some notepaper, he writes rapidly and decidedly.*)

Enter HERO, *with a book.*

WHITE (*looking up fondly*)—Hullo, Hero, tired of croquet?

HERO (*settling down luxuriously in a deep*

lounge)—Very. Will I disturb you, Mr. White, if I stop and read?

WHITE (*wickedly*)—Yes. (*She looks obviously surprised.*) That is, unless you bring a footstool over here and sit by me. (*Moves his chair slightly.*)

(HERO *comes across and sits down with her book in her lap.* WHITE *caresses her hair for a moment or two, then relapses into hard work. Half-an-hour passes.*)

WHITE (*laying down his pen and putting his hand gently over* HERO'S *eyes*)—What realms of fancy are you wandering in now, little student?

HERO (*turning and looking up at him worshippingly*)—I am glad you stopped then, Mr. White. I wanted to ask something.

WHITE (*welcoming the diversion*)—Well, I am all ears, Hero.

HERO—What is a politician, Mr. White?

WHITE (*astonished*)—What on earth makes you ask, Inquisitive?

HERO (*holding up book*)—This; it's about a great quarrel.

WHITE (*still puzzled*)—A great quarrel!

HERO—Between the Dogs and the Hares. Most of the Dogs said that the Hares were made to be eaten, though some thought that it was a shame to hurt them. Then it says—(*Reads.*)

> "Never mind," growled the Hound, "let us stick together, whatever we do." The Hound, you see, was an old politician, and had no conscience.

What *is* a politician, Mr. White?

WHITE (*at first confused, then awakening to the humour of the situation*)—I am a politician, dear.

HERO (*wrestling troublously with her faith in him and the sacred infallibility of "print"*)—And would you have said "Eat the hares," just because the others did, Mr. White? (*Puts down her book to watch his face the better.*)

WHITE (*lightly*)—Well, what is your opinion of me, Hero?

(*She still looks anxiously into his face.*)

WHITE (*piqued into tenderness*)—Surely not so bad as all that, Mignonne.

(HERO'S *gaze droops before his, which is mock-reproachful. She bursts into tears.*)

WHITE—Hero, Hero, whatever is the matter? (*He draws her to him.*) What have I done to make you cry? Don't weep those pretty eyes red over me, *cherie;* I'm not worth it, believe me. What have I done? Is it Francis White or the hares in the fairy story that have called forth these tears? Do speak, my dear; I have sins enough on my conscience without that of grieving a mite like you. (*Tries to look at her face, which she hides.*)

HERO (*between her sobs*)—You looked—you looked—

WHITE (*patiently*)—Looked?

HERO (*brokenly*)—As if—you—*would* have—eaten them. (*Buries her face in his coat-sleeve.*)

WHITE (*aside*)—Then either my face is a deuced deal too tell-tale for a politician's, or your eyes are witch's, Mignonne. (*Aloud*)—And you think that of me, *cherie?*

(HERO *sobs violently while he bends over her, trying silently to soothe her.*)

HERO (*putting a wet hand on his*)—Say you wouldn't, oh, *say* you wouldn't!

(WHITE *sits with his chin on his palm, pondering.*)

HERO (*lifting a tear-stained face beseechingly*)—Oh, say you wouldn't!

WHITE (*aside*)—This is deuced folly! Am I awake or asleep?

HERO—Oh, say you wouldn't!

WHITE (*half-seriously and taking her on his knee*)—But suppose I thought that it was right to eat the Hares, Hero? What then?

HERO (*slowly*)—But do you?

WHITE (*stifling a mean impulse to answer the letter of her question instead of its spirit*)—No, frankly, I don't, Hero. And yet, you little witch, I am really being asked to do something that I don't think right because a lot of other people are going to do it.

HERO (*eagerly*)—And you won't, will you?

(WHITE, *without answering her, brushes her ruffled hair out of her eyes, and looks at her thoughtfully.*)

HERO (*with fresh tears starting*)—You won't, will you, Mr. White?

WHITE (*slowly and solemnly*)—No.

(*He picks out one envelope from the pile of letters that are ready for the post, and gives it to Hero.*)

HERO—Is it to go at once, Mr. White?

WHITE—If you like, Hero. If you want to, you can burn it. If it goes I cannot stand up for the Hares, that is all.

(HERO *gets down from his knee, crosses to the fire, and with a glance at him to see that he has not changed his mind, puts it into the flames. When it is entirely consumed she comes back, and climbs into her place. He puts his arm around her, and sits pondering abstractedly.*)

HERO (*obscurely*)—Will they punish you for standing up for them, Mr. White?

WHITE (*without answering her question*)—When does your father go back to town, Hero?

HERO—Very soon. I think in a day or two.

WHITE (*with a tinge of awkwardness in his manner*)—If I come to Walden Square on Friday afternoon will you give me a flower for my coat?

HERO (*shyly*)—Of course, Mr. White.

(*She sits plaiting the edge of her handkerchief for a few moments, and then, with a sudden start and a shamefaced glance at* WHITE, *runs out, snatching up her book, and dropping in her haste the tiny square of cambric.* WHITE *picks it up, and, slipping it into his vest pocket, goes out on to the lawn.*)

[*Curtain.*]

ACT II.

"SHALL RECEIVE AN HUNDREDFOLD."

Drawing-room at Walden Square. Time, about eleven o'clock, morning.

(*Enter* WHITE, *shown in by* FOULKES, *the footman. He looks very tired, and wears a drooping spray of lilies in the button-hole of his frock-coat.*)

WHITE—No one in but Miss Hero. Can I disturb her lessons a moment? I want to give her a message for Lady Leger.

Exit FOULKES.

WHITE (*throwing himself into an easy-chair*)—So Miss Hero Leger is responsible for no less a catastrophe than the overthrow of Her Majesty's Government. At least, the *Daily News* swears that I am, and Hero is responsible for my change of front.

Enter HERO.

HERO—They said some one wanted me. (*Seeing* WHITE)—Oh! I am glad. Have you come to lunch?

WHITE—It's only eleven, Mignonne; are you hungry so soon?

HERO (*pouting*)—Lessons are so long.

WHITE (*aside*)—So you *are* human, *cara mia*, after all. (*Aloud*)—Well, I have been getting nicely punished for standing up for your Hares.

HERO (*sorrowfully*)—Did it hurt very much?

WHITE—Oh, the worst is to come. Here is a bit. (*Takes out a newspaper and reads.*)

> The defeat of the Government last night was entirely owing to the foolish and unstatesmanlike, though powerful and eloquent, speech of Mr. Francis White, whose unexpected desertion to the enemy completely disorganised the Government forces. After the Premier's emphatic condemnation of the Bill, the victory of its supporters carries with it inevitably the resignation of the present Cabinet.

(*He skims hastily over a few of the succeeding sentences.*)

> At the same time, the weakness of the present Opposition will render it inadvisable for the Conservative party to accept office. Probably Her Majesty will send for the author of the Bill which——

(*Interrupting himself*)—Oh, that's nothing, *cherie.*

HERO (*not at all comprehending*)—What a pity! Are you sorry you did it?

WHITE—What, stood up for the Hares? (*Aside*)—By Jove! I wonder if I am. I believe I'm glad, though why I should be passes my power to guess. I've offended the party leaders, risked my constituency, lost my salary, and generally ruined my chances in life. And yet I don't believe I regret in the least my speech and vote last night. Deuce take it, there was only one way for an honest man to go.

HERO (*fingering his faded "button-hole"*)—Won't you have a new flower, Mr. White? This that I gave you yesterday is quite dead. Let me go and get you one.

Runs out. Enter FOULKES.

FOULKES (*seeing* WHITE)—Oh (*calling behind him*), Mr. White's not gone; he's here. (*Goes out and re-enters, bringing a letter.*) For you, sir (*handing it to* WHITE). Very important, the messenger said.

WHITE—Thank you; I'll ring in a moment if there's a reply.

Exit FOULKES. *Re-enter* HERO.

WHITE (*tearing open letter*)—Another wigging, I suppose. By Jove! F.'s Premier, and —good heavens!—offers me the Home Office. (*Sits staring at the letter, then springs up.*)

HERO—Won't I put the flower in your coat, Mr. White?

WHITE (*starting and dropping on one knee beside her*)—Hero, Hero, my little Hero! you have made my fortune instead of spoiling it! By Jove! what's that about "the life which now is?" (HERO *fixes a rosebud in his button-hole.*) Thank you, Mignonne. I ought to belong to you now, since it is your wise

counsels that have brought me success. (*Looking at her strangely*)—How old are you, Hero?

HERO (*putting the finishing touches to her work*)—Twelve last April.

WHITE (*aside*)—Ay!—"April's child is fair of face." And I am twenty-nine. *Bah!* what a fool I am! (*Aloud*)—Good-bye, *carina*. (*Kisses her tenderly.*)

HERO—Good-bye.

WHITE—Good-bye. [*Exit.*

[*Curtain.*]

FINIS.

IN PROPRIA PERSONA.

A huckster in Life's market-place,
  Where each must earn his drink and victual,
I, who have visions and to spare—
Albeit visions are a ware
  Extremely brittle—
Flambeau in hand, and at my back
  A basketful of new romances,
Do stand and cry, "Now, what d'ye lack?—
  Pray try my fancies."

What time I made these folk of clay,
  And limned their faces sad or merry,
I toiled with ne'er a thought of pay,
But work being done, an artist may
  Be hungry—very:
And so I cry, "Now, what d'ye lack?—
  Here is your choice of joy or sorrow;"
If trade prove brisk I'll soon be back—
  Perhaps to-morrow.

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Knight, George
Dust in the balance

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